WONDER TALES OF BIBLE DAYS

BY

ELMA EHRLICH LEVINGER

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"If an Axe Can Make Idols, it Can Also Mar Them!" Said Abram

WONDER TALES
OF BIBLE DAYS

RABBINIC LEGENDS
RETOLD FOR JEWISH CHILDREN

BY

ELMA EHRLICH LEVINGER
Author of "Playmates in Egypt", etc.

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This collection
of stories for children
is dedicated in memory of
a happy childhood
to the memory of
My Father

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A WORD TO THE CHILDREN WHO WILL READ THIS BOOK

Of course, you know all about the great people of the Bible—Abraham, the Friend of God; Joseph, who became a Prince in Egypt; and Moses, who was saved from the waters that he might grow up to save his people. If you do not know these stories, read them for yourself in the Bible just as they were written hundreds and hundreds of years ago.

But the Jewish people have always loved their wise men and their heroes so much, that they not only learned about them from the Bible stories, but constantly told their children new stories about Abraham and Joseph and all the others, filling in the blank places where the writers of the Bible are silent. Many of these stories were gathered together in their great books such as the Talmud

and the Midrash, which not only the Jewish people but great scholars of all times and all countries have come to reverence. These stories are very, very old; but today little children in the Hebrew schools of Poland and far Jerusalem read them in their class rooms, and American children who attend Sabbath schools hear these ancient legends from their teachers.

They were written a long time ago by and for the Jewish people; but they are stories which every child in every country should enjoy reading today.

ELMA EHRLICH LEVINGER

THE BOY WHO BROKE THE IDOLS

I

THE BOY WHO BROKE THE IDOLS

Many years ago in the far-off city of Ur in the land of the Chaldees, there dwelt a worthy man named Terah and his wife, Emtelia. Terah was a man of great wealth and an officer in the court of the mighty king, Nimrod, who was so powerful that all the kings of the earth trembled before him. And Terah had everything that his heart could desire except a son to whom he might leave his possessions when he died.

One day Emtelia told her husband of a dream she had just dreamed, which had made her happy. She dreamed that as she walked along a river, she saw a star descend from the heavens and float upon the water. Upon the star lay a child which stretched out its shining arms to

Emtelia and called her name. The next night she dreamed the same dream again, and on the third night also; but on the third night it seemed that she took the child to her breast and it called her "Mother." Then Terah and Emtelia rejoiced, believing that they might have a son.

Now, Nimrod was not only the greatest hunter the world had ever seen, but he was also a cunning reader of the stars. When he looked upon the heavens at night he was able to foretell what the future would bring to men. One night he stood upon the marble balcony of his palace and saw a sight that filled him with wonder; for the skies were dark and empty until suddenly a great star appeared which filled the heavens with light. Then it disappeared suddenly, like a candle flame blown out by a strong wind.

The next night Nimrod gave a great banquet to his nobles and his captains. His astrologers sat at his tables also and

drank his wine and made merry. Every man who was there assured Nimrod that he was the mightiest of all mighty kings and that his reign would never end. But even as they spoke, a great, shining star appeared in the heavens and seemed to draw to itself four smaller stars from the four corners of the sky which it swallowed up. Then it disappeared and left the heavens inky black and without any stars at all. The people were all sorely frightened and even Nimrod trembled. But he remembered that he was the mightiest king on earth; so he tried to hide his fear and spoke in a loud and terrible voice.

"Let my astrologers come before me," cried Nimrod, "and tell me the meaning of the strange thing our eyes have just seen."

Then the astrologers left their places and approached the throne where Nimrod sat in his robes of gold and silver tissue with a crown of pearls and emeralds about his head. They bowed their faces to the

earth and feared to speak, for no man cared to risk his life by saying anything which would prove unpleasant to the king.

But Nimrod cried out again and this time more impatiently than before: "Tell me the meaning of this strange thing our eyes have seen!"

The chief of the astrologers was a very old man, so old that he had even forgotten the year of his birth. He had lived in the court of King Nimrod's father and of his father's father before him, and everyone said he was the wisest man in the entire kingdom. So the others waited for him to speak, because they respected his years and his wisdom.

The oldest of the astrologers bowed before the king until his long, white beard swept the marble pavement. "May the king live forever," he said, "and may he not consume his servant with his anger, since the words of his servant will not be pleasant in his ears. But the stars have spoken and the doom they pronounce

must come to pass. Know, O king, that the great, shining star that rose in the heaven is to foretell the birth of a little child this very night. He will grow very powerful and at last his children will swallow up the nations from the four corners of the earth, just as his star has devoured the four lesser stars from the four corners of the sky."

At this every man trembled and the faces of the courtiers and the soldiers showed white and frightened in the flickering torch light. No man was more alarmed than Terah, for he remembered his wife's dream. But Nimrod's heart was filled with pride; besides he had drunk deeply and felt boastful. He laughed heartily at the saying of the chief astrologer.

"Have you lived so long, old man," he cried, "that your wisdom teaches you to warn the greatest king on earth to fear a new-born child? I, too, can read the stars, and this is what the monstrous star

and the four little stars tell to me: I, Nimrod, shine like a star as I sit upon my glittering throne, and all the kings from the four corners of the earth come to pay tribute to my greatness."

But, although he spoke proudly, his heart was troubled, and he said to the heralds who stood before his throne: "Tomorrow go the length and breadth of my land and proclaim through every street that every boy child born to-night shall be slain. Thus the mighty king of which this graybeard speaks will die almost before he has drawn his first breath!"

The heart of Terah was shaken with fear, for he could not forget his wife's dream and the words of the king filled him with terror. As soon as the banquet was over and the guests were dismissed, he hurried home that he might tell his wife of the vision of the star and of the king's commandment. When he reached the threshold of his house, the sound of wailing and lamentation met his ears.

His wife's handmaiden had just borne a son; but the child had died and the mother could not be comforted.

Terah stopped to comfort the women who had joined their friend in her grief and were filling the house with their mourning; suddenly he heard a sound that made him go sick with fear. For through the hall came the high, shrill cry of a baby newly born; a moment later his old nurse came from the mistress' chamber. She bowed low before Terah, sobbing in her joy; for Emtelia had borne a son.

Now Terah rejoiced; but his happiness lasted only a little while, for soon he remembered the harsh command of the king. He resolved to save his child from Nimrod even if his own life paid for his disobedience, and he went to counsel with his wife how the child might be hidden until he grew into manhood. Even as they talked together, dawn broke over the city of Ur; the heralds of the king passed down the white streets, seeking all the

new-born male children that they might slay them and do the will of Nimrod.

Emtelia in her pride and joy had told certain women of the neighborhood her dream, speaking proudly of the star which had promised the child a life of good fortune. One of these women had told the tale to her husband who was among the king's astrologers and he had straightway told it to Nimrod. So Nimrod, remembering the mother's dream of the star-child, was frightened more than he admitted even to himself by the vision of the great star which had devoured the lesser ones. He sent his two most trusted captains to the house of Terah as soon as he learned that a son had been born to Terah. They were not to slay the child along with the others, for Nimrod had ordered them to bring the babe to the palace that he might slay it with his own hands and be sure of its death.

Terah was filled with despair, but Emtelia's mother-love made her crafty

and she thought of a plan to save her child. She called her women to her and bade them dress the slave child that had died at birth in the rich garments she herself had prepared for her own little one. It was this dead child the soldiers found upon the bed when they entered her chamber and demanded to have the baby that they might bring it before the king. But Emtelia's own son lay safe and warm in the faithful arms of the nurse who hid the babe beneath her cloak and escaped through the city's gate out into the wilderness beyond Ur. For Emtelia had ordered her to hide the child in some cave beyond the city where it might be safe from the king.

The dead child of the handmaiden, wrapped in rich robes, a gold chain about its throat, lay at Nimrod's feet, while the trusty captain told how it had died at birth. Then Nimrod felt sure that he was safe, and he defied the stars in the heavens that had warned him of the child

who some day would be stronger than many kings. So Nimrod called for his horses and those who ran before his chariot and went to hunt. He forgot for a very long time the warning of the stars, while in the city of Ur of the Chaldees many mothers mourned the deaths of their sons, slain by the soldiers of the wicked king. The handmaiden of Emtelia wept also for her dead child; but Emtelia was very hopeful and waited eagerly for her nurse to return to her with news of the babe she had left in the cave. Here the child remained until it was safe for him to be brought back to his father's house.

II

It happened that Terah, the father of Abram, was a maker of idols, both great and small, which he chiselled out of stone in his work shop and sold to the people of Ur. For the inhabitants of the walled city of Ur had many gods which they

worshipped daily with prayers and with burnt-offerings. Living in his father's house, with the graven images of his father's gods ever before him, Abram accepted the idols of his fathers as his gods and worshipped them night and morning.

But one day Abram entered the little room where the idols of his father's house stood; he saw that the god Marumath, a mighty idol of stone, had fallen upon its face. Abram was greatly alarmed, for he had been told that such a thing meant black misfortune to all his father's house. So he struggled with all his might to raise the god back to his place. But the idol was too heavy for the youth to lift; he cried out to his father and brothers, who came hurrying in to help him. They were greatly alarmed to see their chief god lying prostrate upon the ground and tried to replace it among the other idols; but when the god Marumath stood in his place again they were horrified to see

that his head had been cracked by the fall to the stone pavement. It swayed from side to side and suddenly toppled over, breaking into many pieces on the floor.

Then Abram broke into wailing, for he feared that the great god Marumath was dead and that evil would come upon the entire household. But Terah, his father, only smiled; he took up his chisel that he might carve a new head for the broken idol. When it was done, Terah placed the head upon the body of the broken god; then he and all his household rejoiced and paid great honor to Marumath.

Abram, however, did not rejoice, for his heart was troubled. He began to wonder how a wise man like his father could worship a bit of stone like the idol Marumath, which he had made with his own hands. "If my father carved the god Marumath," thought Abram, "it is more seemly that the idol should worship my father." But he was afraid to tell

his father of the thoughts that troubled him.

The very next day, Terah brought from his shop five new idols he had just made. Abram helped him tie them to the saddle of the mule that his father had given him for his own. Then Abram kissed his father goodbye and set out for an inn several miles from the city, where merchants from Fandana in Syria often stopped for rest and refreshment on their way to Egypt. Abram felt very proud to be entrusted with the sale of these idols, the finest and largest his father had ever made. As he went along the road, now and then prodding his lagging mule with the little stick that he carried, he pictured himself bargaining with the merchants until they paid him twice the amount his father had instructed him to ask. He thought of his father's joy when he returned home with the bag at his side heavy with gold coins.

Abram reached the inn in safety; but

just as he paused before the door to admire one of the merchant's camels that stood there, very beautiful in its trappings of crimson and gold which glittered in the sun, the great beast yawned and tossed its head high in the air. For once Abram's lazy mule needed no prodding; the frightened little creature turned and ran down the rocky road with all its speed. Abram hurried after the animal, but ere he reached its side, the mule had run against a huge boulder by the wayside, shattering to bits three of the idols fastened to its saddle.

Abram in his anger struck the animal again and again; but when he realized that all his blows could never restore the ruined idols, he sat upon the ground and wept aloud as he thought of returning home to meet his father's anger. As he lamented by the roadside a merchant came out of the inn, mounted the richly decked camel that had caused all Abram's misfortune, and proceeded on his way.

But when he passed Abram, the boy cried so loudly that the merchant stopped to ask him the reason of his grief.

When Abram told him the misfortune which had fallen upon him and the wares he had intended to sell for his father, the merchant, without a moment's hesitation, unfastened a bag of gold pieces he wore knotted in his girdle and flung it into Abram's lap. "Weep no more, my lad," he commanded, "for I would not have your father punish you for the fault of my wretched beast. This will pay for the broken idols many times and for the two which are not broken. Now make haste and tie them upon my camel and I will take them home with me."

Abram dried his eyes and kissed the merchant's hands with gratitude; then he helped him bind the idols which were still unbroken upon the back of the camel. The merchant rode away and Abram sat down by the roadside again to count the gold pieces which amounted

to almost treble the sum his father had demanded for the stone gods. He went home rejoicing and handed the purse of gold to his father. "Blessed are you, my son, unto the gods," said Terah, "since you have sold all of my idols."

But Abram said to himself: "My father is not blessed through his gods, nor have they the strength to bless me. If they are so powerful, why can they not save themselves?' He thought of the god Marumath lying helpless upon the floor and the three gods broken upon the roadside. At last he decided that these were nothing but clay and stone painted with bright colors, but without power and strength. He wanted to tell his thoughts to his father, but he was afraid of his anger. When his father ordered him to take more images upon the street and sell them to the people of Ur, he dared not disobey him.

Abram fastened a tray about his neck with leather thongs and his father placed

upon it several idols which he had just made. "Go into the streets, my son," said Terah, "and cry aloud to all who pass that you have these fine, new idols for sale. The gods grant you will be as fortunate as on the day you sold my other fine idols for a goodly price."

Abram went down the street, crying out his wares to all who passed; but his heart was troubled, for he was ashamed to sell these bits of stone for gods. Presently an old man with a long white beard came to him and inquired the price of the smallest idol.

"I am very poor," he said, "and can scarce afford to buy bread. But perhaps I can buy this idol and he will bring me food and comfort in my weak old age."

"How old are you?" asked Abram.

"I am almost seventy, my son," answered the old man. "Why do you ask?"

"My father made this idol only yesterday," said Abram, "so it is only a day

old and weaker than the weakest newborn baby in all the city of Ur. You say you are seventy. Are you not better able to provide bread and meat for your old age than this bit of stone?"

So the old man bought no idol that day and went his way thinking over what Abram had said to him.

Then a woman rushed from her house as Abram passed. She caught his cloak and asked to look over his tray of idols. "I have not dared to leave my house for three days," she told Abram. "But now that a merchant with idols passes my door I shall be safe again. Three days ago thieves broke into my house and stole my household idol. I have not closed my eyes in slumber for fear harm would come to me, for what can a poor lonely widow do to protect herself in a house in which there is no god to watch over her? Now sell me your largest idol that I may set it up within my shrine and again dwell in safety in my own house."

But Abram laughed at her and said: "Good widow, if your idol was strong enough to protect you and your house, why was it not strong enough to protect itself against thieves? Do not buy an idol from me, for it is less strong than you would be with a stout club in your hand. Buy a cudgel, good widow, and depend upon your own right arm rather than upon this foolish thing of painted stone."

"You are right," said the widow. "I will buy a club for myself, but never another idol." And she went back into her house.

Abram went down the streets; whenever anyone sought to buy an idol he dissuaded him with strong words. At night he came home to his father, who frowned when he saw that the boy had not sold a single idol. Then Abram confessed how he had driven away his customers, since he no longer believed in the might of the stone gods.

Terah fell upon his son and would have beaten him to death in his anger, had not

Abram's mother come between them. Emtelia persuaded Terah that the youth was under the spell of evil spirits, who perhaps had gained their power over him during his sojourn in the cave. She promised her husband that if he would leave Abram in peace she would win him back to the worship of their household gods. Then she spoke long and tenderly to Abram, persuading him that since his father was older and wiser, it was Abram's duty not to attempt to bring new customs into their household. At last Abram yielded to her entreaties and went before his father to beg his pardon and to promise to obey in the future.

"It is well," said Terah, and he stroked his beard with a satisfied smile as he gazed upon the bowed head of his son. "Now let me hear no more of this foolish talk. Yea, it is worse than foolish—it is a crime against the gods themselves and against Nimrod our king. If he hears of your folly you will surely die."

So Abram was frightened into silence. When his father gave him a dish filled with savory food to be placed upon the household shrine as the day's offering to the household gods, he made no objection but went at once to carry out his father's words. He tried to persuade himself that the idols of his father's house were indeed mighty and far more powerful than anything else beneath the sun.

The room where the household idols stood was a fair spot with colored pillars; the floor was made of stones of many colors and cut in different shapes. In the center were little marble basins edged with green water plants, very pleasant to the eye of one who sought the place to escape from the noonday heat; from each basin rose a little fountain whose spray made a tinkling sound against the stones. Around the four walls stood idols of stone, each on his separate pedestal of stone with a small slab before each image for the daily offering.

First, Abram stood before the great god Marumath, the tallest of the idols and the one most honored in Terah's house. Abram held out his steaming bowl to the graven image and said courteously: "Great Marumath, deign to bow your head and eat of the good food I have brought for you." But the god did not answer. Then Abram spoke again: "Great Marumath, I pray you eat, or my father will be much grieved and his anger will burn hot against me, since he thinks I have displeased you and all this company." Still the god did not answer. So Abram cried a third time: "I beseech you—eat!" and he thrust the bowl into the idol's face. But the image gave no sign that he had heard anything at all.

Then Abram went to each god in turn, even to Barisat, a very humble god, small and made of wood. But not an image spoke or paid the slightest attention to his offering, Abram's heart was filled with doubt; but he dared not tell his

father that the gods had refused his offering. "Perhaps," he thought, "they are not hungry this evening. Or perhaps the food I have brought them is not to their liking. Tomorrow I will prepare them a most savory portion; every god will not only eat what I shall bring him, but will ask for more." So he said nothing to his father, but threw the offering into the fire.

The next day Abram prepared a most savory portion of food with his own hands and placed it in a gold bowl set with precious stones. He approached his father and bowed before him humbly. "Father," said Abram, "will you not permit me to serve the gods again this evening?"

Terah embraced his son and wept with joy, for now he felt certain that Abram's heart had turned back to his fathers' gods and that he would no longer cry out against them in the streets. He gave Abram his blessing and sent him again

to the household temple to present his offering to the gods.

Again Abram asked first Marumath, and after him the lesser gods, to eat of the good food he had brought to them. But not a god stirred in his place, nor said a single word. Suddenly, the spirit of the One God came upon Abram. He flung the dish upon the ground and cried in a loud voice: "Woe unto my father and his wicked generation who serve these idols which have mouths without speech, eyes without sight, ears without hearing and legs without motion."

Looking about him, Abram saw lying upon the ground the very axe his father had used the day he had chiselled the new head of the image of Marumath. He laughed scornfully. "If an axe can make idols it can also mar them!" said Abram. He seized the axe, brought it heavily down upon the idol that stood on the right of Marumath, and hacked off both its arms. Then he turned to the image

that stood on the left of Marumath and hacked off both its legs so that the image fell to the ground and was broken into many pieces. From one god to another he went and, when he had finished, not one idol remained whole except the great image of Marumath. Abram put the axe into one of the idol's large hands. Then he ran to call his father.

"Father, father!" cried Abram when he came upon the roof where Terah sat nodding in the sun. "Come and see what your idols have done. Come and make peace between them or they will all be destroyed." He seized his father's hand and dragged him into the room where Terah and his family had long worshipped their household gods.

Terah stood and stared before him, a dazed man. Upon the floor lay many of his idols shattered and hacked to pieces, while those few which remained were hideously defaced and gashed. Only the great god Marumath remained in his

place undisturbed. In one of his great hands he brandished an axe.

"My son," faltered Terah in horror, "what have you done?"

"I only tried to make peace among your gods, father," answered Abram, pretending to speak humbly. "When I entered the room bearing the savory food, they all cried aloud in a greedy voice and bade me serve them. Each idol demanded his food first; so to still their cries, I placed the bowl before the shrine of Marumath and begged him to serve his brothers. But the greedy ones would not wait for their turn; they all rushed upon him and demanded the most savory portions of the dish. Marumath did his best to quiet them, but they would not listen. Then he, too, became angry, seized your axe and slew all the other images, as you see. He is still very angry, my father, I beg you not to approach him lest he do you some harm!"

"Cease your mockery," cried Terah in

a terrible voice. "For your own hand has done this thing. Have I lived all these years to be told that an image of wood or stone can raise its hand and destroy its brothers!"

"Then, if there is no power in them, why do you worship these dead things?" asked Abram, "I am only a lad but I am stronger than the most powerful of your gods." He seized the axe which Marumath held in his hand and struck the idol such a blow that it fell to the floor and was dashed to pieces.

Terah grew afraid; but he no longer threatened Abram nor sought to punish him. He thought the lad was afflicted with madness and prayed only that his wild deed would not reach the ears of Nimrod, who would surely punish such a crime with death. He told the people of his household that a madman from the desert—where so many of those unfortunates dwelt apart from all mankind—had wandered into the house and destroy-

ed his gods. He straightway began to carve himself new gods, and his two sons helped him; but they asked no aid of Abram, who never entered their workshop.

III

Several years passed since Abram destroyed the idols in Terah's home. Some of the people whom he had advised to forsake the old faith now became convinced that the God of Abram was the only true God in the world. Among these was the widow whom Abram had converted when she was about to purchase a handsome idol from his father's collection because her own idol had been stolen.

She at last decided that the lad had spoken truly. So when the thieves who had stolen her household god were captured and her idol was restored to her, instead of replacing it in its shrine, she threw it to the ground and broke it into many pieces. Then she went up

and down the streets crying at the top of her voice: "I will no longer bow to idols, but will seek the gods of Abram, son of Terah."

Her neighbors heard her mad words and dragged her before Nimrod. The king sat upon his throne of gold and ivory and judged the people for this crime and for that. Never before had he condemned man or woman for such a sin, for no one had ever dreamed of denying the gods of the Chaldees. When he threatened the widow with death by fire she did not tremble but only repeated; "I will seek the gods of Abram. They are more mighty than your gods and will save me."

"Does she mean the lad Abram, the son of Terah?" asked Nimrod of the officers who stood about his throne.

"Yea, O king," answered the officers trembling.

"Who is this Abram that he dare teach the people and seek to destroy our gods?" demanded Nimrod.

A woman came from the crowd and threw herself before Nimrod and broke into loud sobbing. At last she said: "O king, if you will spare the life of your handmaiden, and of this poor widow also, I will tell you what you want to know."

When Nimrod promised to spare both her life and the widow's, the woman went on with her story. She said, "On the night my son was born in the house of Terah my master, the wife of Terah bore him a son, and that son was called Abram. Because it had been foretold that a boy-child born that night would become too powerful in the land, you sought the death of every child born in Ur. Your soldiers came first to the house of Terah, for it was foretold that his child was to be born under a mighty star and it was this child you feared the most."

"No!" cried Nimrod proudly, though he trembled a little as he sat upon his throne of gold and ivory. "I did not fear the son of Terah, for I am mightier

than even the stars. But that I might laugh in the face of astrologers who had predicted evil because of the star, I sent for the child of Terah first that I might slay him in his weakness."

"Yea, O king," answered the woman, "and your servants brought you a dead child. But the child they brought you was my own babe, and the child of Terah was hidden away for many years. It is this child, this Abram, whose words have snared my friend and brought her beneath your anger. Send for Terah, O king! He will not dare to deny the truth of my words."

Then Nimrod was truly afraid, for he saw that the stars had protected the child whom he had believed to be dead these many years. He ordered his captains to go at once to Terah's house and bring the youth Abram before him.

Terah had already heard of the widow's madness; he feared that now Nimrod would surely learn of Abram's folly and

seek to slay him. So he called Abram to him and gave him bread and a cruse of water and set him upon his fastest stallion. "You are a madman," said Terah to his son, "but I would not see the soldiers of Nimrod destroy you before my eyes. Hasten to hide yourself in the wilderness and never return to Ur lest your life be forfeit."

Abram spurred his horse, and the white stallion tore across the sands like a streak of light; but the soldiers of Nimrod followed close behind and Abram feared that they might overtake him.

"O God!" cried Abram as he looked back over his shoulders and saw his pursuers gaining upon him, "did you not put it into my heart to destroy the idols of my father, and will you now let these men kill me?"

"Have I not saved you before?" said a Voice from afar. It died away and Abram saw opening up before him the very cave where he had been sheltered as

a child. He entered; the moss around the opening grew quickly into a heavy curtain to hide him from his foes.

The soldiers of Nimrod who followed upon his heels were not frightened at the sudden miracle. They thrust aside the green curtains at the mouth of the cave and tried to enter. But a bright light suddenly shone forth and blinded them. One by one they came staggering out of the cave, calling to their companions and begging for help. Then, just as suddenly, their sight returned to them, and every warrior looked upon the frightened face of his comrade. When they turned they saw that a heavy cloud had come up and hidden from sight the cave where Abram lay. Trembling and afraid, they hastened back to Nimrod their king and begged him to slay them rather than bid them to seek Abram further. So frightened were they that they begged leave to go to Babylon where certain of Nimrod's wise men dwelt. "In Babylon," they said,

"your astrologers will advise us how to seize Abram by magic since we have failed through force." Nimrod consented; with his army and his court he set out for the fair city of Babylon.

Meanwhile Abram was well contented in his cave and would have remained there till the end of his days, had not his God sent the angel Gabriel to bid him follow the king and his court to Babylon. This Abram did not wish to do. "Twice," he said, "have I risked my life to proclaim the God I found in the wilderness. Once I mocked the idols to the widow who afterwards betrayed me; once I broke our household gods. Have I not done enough?"

But Gabriel answered him sternly: "You have not done enough until you tell King Nimrod to his face that your God is stronger than he and the gods he serves."

"Nimrod, the king, will slay me if I appear before his face," said Abram.

"No," answered Gabriel. "The God who saved you from his soldiers will save you even at the foot of the king's throne."

Still Abram was not willing to make the journey to Babylon. "The city is too far off for a foot journey," he said, "and, as I am but a youth and unarmed, robbers may steal my horse from me and slay me on the roadside."

"It will take the king and his court forty days and forty nights to journey to Babylon," answered Gabriel. "But you need no provisions for the way, no horse to ride upon, no warriors to do battle with Nimrod for your sake. See, I will spread my wings, and you will sit upon my shoulders. I will take you to the distant city of Babylon, and the journey which will take the king and his court forty days, we will accomplish in one hour."

As Abram could think of no further objections after that, he consented to meet the king at Babylon.

The court of king Nimrod in Babylon was the fairest place the eye of man had ever seen. In fact, it was so beautiful that it is said the angels copied it in every detail and constructed a court like it for the abode of virtuous kings after their death. The pavilion where the king held court stood in a rose garden of such fragrance that mariners far out at sea could enjoy its odors. The pillars of the pavilion were formed of colored glass—each pillar a different color—and cunning artists had placed a light within each pillar so that they appeared like flowers of many hues with glow-worms shining through the petals.

In the center of this garden stood King Nimrod's throne, a wonderful structure of gold and ivory, covered with small statues wrought in silver and bronze. Beside this royal dais stood another throne, equally high and of equal beauty and magnificence; on every step of this second throne stood two images of the

favorite gods of Nimrod, one at either end. And high above all others, on the very topmost step, stood the god that Nimrod feared and venerated more than any other, an image that was very horrible to look upon. Its hands and feet were smeared with blood of human sacrifice; its eyes were great, glowing rubies. It wore a crown of red rubies and a chain of them about its neck. Twelve priests, clad in garments of scarlet, waited upon the god and all the people did him special homage; for Nimrod had proclaimed him king of the gods, and considered him as a brother.

When Nimrod learned that Abram had preceded him to Babylon—no man knew how—he lost all pleasure in his court; he even began to doubt his gods. But that no man might dream he was afraid, the king gave a splendid feast to all his nobles and soldiers and astrologers. For seven days and nights they ate and drank and praised the gods of the Chaldeans. Then

the king commanded Abram to come before him. Before the hour arrived, Nimrod and his court put on the finest robes of gold and silver and all their jewels. Nimrod believed that if Abram once saw how powerful he was above all kings and how magnificent was his court, the lad would fear him and declare the gods of Nimrod the strongest.

Ten slaves, clad in vestments of black and silver, led Abram to the foot of the throne. At first he was so dazzled by the splendor of the garments the courtiers wore and their many jewels, that he could scarcely raise his eyes from the ground. At last he looked up at Nimrod. The king sat upon his heaped cushions of green embroidered with pearls, while two huge Nubian slaves fanned him with great green fans and two others guarded him with curved, drawn swords.

For a long time Abram remained at the foot of the throne without speaking, and Nimrod said no word to him but looked

For a Long Time Abram Remained at the Foot of the Throne Without Speaking

down on the youth, clad in rough garments, his face shining like a star, his eyes brave and quiet. So it was Nimrod who was afraid at their first meeting; but he hid his fright and said in a terrible voice:

"Have you come at last to pay worship to my gods and to the gods of the Chaldees?"

Still Abram spoke no word, but he placed one hand upon Nimrod's throne and shook it until it swayed like a leaf in the wind. Nimrod turned pale; but he dared not order the guards to seize the youth.

The guards, too, were very glad not to have to stir from their places.

"Tremble, O king," cried Abram at last, "for I come to tell you of One who is stronger than you and your gods. He is the king of the whole world. He can shake its foundations as I shake your throne. Now, Nimrod, before it is too late, confess that my God is stronger than

you, and that I am His appointed messenger."

By this time Nimrod had regained his courage and he laughed aloud. "I fear neither you nor your God!" he exclaimed. "Too long have I endured your insolence and allowed your crimes against the gods to go unpunished. Sacrifice to them now before the sight of all my court and crave their pardon lest they destroy you where you stand."

Abram turned to the throne of the idols, glancing upward until his eyes rested upon the hideous god with ruby eyes. Then he knew what his God desired him to do and he answered the king with guile:

"I have done ill to mock the gods of the Chaldees. Let me pay them reverence in sight of all your court. First let me bow before the chief of all your gods and bring him sacrifice."

Abram's words filled Nimrod with delight; he bade a slave bring to Abram a great silver bowl filled with choice

morsels for the first of all his gods. Abram, bowing humbly, took the bowl and began to ascend the stairs which led to the chief of Nimrod's idols, while Nimrod and his priests watched him in triumph, pleased over their easy victory. But their hearts grew troubled, for as Abram mounted the stairs, pausing before each god, the two idols that stood there bowed to the ground as though to do him reverence, and although the red-clad priests began to mutter all the spells that they knew, the idols could not raise themselves again.

At last Abram reached the very top of the stairs. He held his bowl of offering high in the air and stood erect before the dreadful idol with the ruby eyes. Then he flung the choice morsels the priests had prepared for the idol straight into its blood-smeared face. Before Nimrod and his court could stir in their astonishment, he struck the idol so heavily with his fist that it tottered from its throne and

crashed down the long flight of stairs to the marble pavement below.

Then the people of the court and the red-robed priests cried out in anger and would have torn Abram limb from limb had not Nimrod bade them leave the lad unharmed. He called to his most trusty captain to seize Abram and cast him into a dungeon many feet below the earth; then the king himself went to the mouth of the pit and called down mockingly: "I have set twenty strong men about the mouth of your prison, O Abram, and each man will pay with his life if you escape. Now cry upon your God to comfort you!"

Abram answered him steadily: "My God will save me even from the pit!"

As soon as Nimrod had departed, however, Abram wept bitterly, for he had heard the king give orders to the warden of the prison that no food or drink should be brought to him. "Alas," cried Abram, "why did my God save me from the soldiers of Nimrod when they pursued

me in the desert, if He wanted me to die of starvation in Nimrod's dungeon?"

Suddenly a great light filled the dungeon and the angel Gabriel stood before Abram. "Cease your doubting," he said sternly, "and remember that the God who fed you in the wilderness when you were a helpless child will not let you starve in Nimrod's dungeon." Then he caused a spring to well up out of the ground and it spouted sweet wine. Every day, both morning and evening, it flowed until Abram had drunk his fill; every morning Gabriel brought Abram bread that he might not perish of hunger.

One morning, when Nimrod returned from his hunt, he suddenly remembered that he had not asked his warden for news of Abram. "Surely, he has long ago died of hunger," said Nimrod and bade the warden bring forth Abram's corpse. But the warden found Abram alive and very comfortable, eating his breakfast which Gabriel had just brought to him.

"What does this mean?" cried the astonished warden. "I have watched the soldiers so carefully that I am sure they have allowed no one to come to you with food and drink. Who has fed you?"

"The God who feeds all His children," answered Abram, and he talked long and earnestly with the warden. Then he gave the warden wine to drink from the fountain which flowed from the dungeon floor and sent him back to Nimrod to tell him what he had seen.

When the warden appeared before the king and praised the God of Abram, Nimrod was very angry. He called for his chief executioner and bade him strike off the warden's head. But the warden's neck became like stone; the sword could not even scratch it. The executioner sent for a new sword; but the angel Gabriel came meanwhile in a thick cloud and carried the warden away. Then Nimrod sent his soldiers to bring Abram before him.

When Abram stood before Nimrod, the king and his priests and his court all marvelled to see that he had grown very beautiful. His face shone like a star, his cheeks were round and rosy. Nimrod pretended to believe that Abram knew some secret witchcraft that had kept him strong and well while in the dungeon. "I will no longer postpone a trial between Abram's gods and mine," he said. "I will cast him into a great fire and if his gods are stronger, they will save him and I will set him free and never lay hands upon him again. But if my gods are more powerful, they will cause him to die in the flames and he will trouble us no more."

For three days and three nights the people carried wood for the furnace into which Abram was to be cast, until the pile they had brought seemed to reach nearly to the stars. Then two of the strongest of Nimrod's guards bound Abram and sought to cast him into the flames. But when the two soldiers opened the door of

the furnace to cast Abram into it, the flames leaped out and burned them to death. Nimrod called two other soldiers to take their place, but these also were burned by the fire.

It was then that Satan appeared beside Nimrod on his throne, very much like a human being in garments of black silk. He bowed low before Nimrod and said: "May the king live forever and may his enemies all be destroyed! Why does the king not order his servants to place this man Abram in a catapult so that he can be cast into the flames from a distance and none of the king's servants may suffer from the flames?"

This seemed a very fine plan to the king; he had Abram placed in a huge catapult and cast him into the furnace from a distance. Now the priests and the astrologers rejoiced, and the people of the court shouted aloud in praise of Nimrod who had at last found a way to destroy his enemy.

In the midst of the flames Abram opened his eyes and saw Gabriel standing before him. "Shall I save you?" asked Gabriel and held out his white hand as though to ward off the fire.

But Abram answered him: "Nay, for my God will save me out of the flames."

Even while Abram spoke, God resolved to test him no longer. He turned the flames into red roses and the logs of wood into blossoming trees. The odor was so great that for a moment those who stood by waiting to see Abram perish almost swooned. Then they cried in one voice: "The God of Abram is mightier than all the gods of Nimrod!"

Nimrod was almost mad with anger and disappointment. "This man Abram uses witchcraft," he muttered. "That is why he doesn't die."

Nimrod ordered his soldiers to cast Abram into the dungeon again that he might devise stronger torments for him; but the people cried out that he must be

set free. They reminded the king of his promise to release Abram if he should not perish in the flames. "Send him far away, O king," they besought Nimrod, "for if he remains here, we may anger him and he will surely call down the wrath of his God and destroy us all." To this Nimrod agreed. He ordered Abram to be loosed from the rope that bound him and told him that he was free to leave the court.

But Abram lingered a moment before the king's throne and his face was hard and stern. "I will go upon my way, O king," he said, "for God has instructed me to wander far from this place and teach all His children to destroy their idols just as I sought to destroy yours. Many will listen to my teachings. But you will not remember the words I have spoken to you nor the sight that you have seen tonight. You will never think of the God of Abram again until He again reminds you of His power."

He spoke in such a dreadful voice that

the whole court trembled and grew afraid, but Nimrod only laughed. Yet Abram spoke truly. After a life of triumph such as few kings have known, Nimrod, the mighty conqueror, was himself conquered. A tiny gnat flew into his ear and its buzzing drove him mad with pain. Nimrod, after calling in vain upon all his gods, whose images stood before him, cried at last to the unseen God of Abram to bring him relief. But the God he had mocked so long did not answer him. Nimrod was cut off in his pride by a tiny insect he might have crushed beneath his heel as he walked through the pleasure gardens of Babylon and Ur.

THE SLAVE WHO BECAME A PRINCE

II

THE SLAVE WHO BECAME A PRINCE

When Joseph was a youth and lived in his father's house in Canaan, his father Jacob treated him like a prince and gave him everything his heart desired. Joseph was the handsomest of Jacob's twelve sons and looked so much like his mother Rachel, that whenever Jacob looked upon him he thought of his beautiful dead wife and was comforted a little for her loss. He fed the lad with dainties from his own plate and showered him with gifts; he even forbade Joseph to share the labors of his older brothers.

Joseph was glad not to have to help his brothers watch the flocks. He was inclined to be lazy and he preferred to spend his time laughing with his father's hand-

maidens instead of sharing his brothers' toil. But on a certain day Jacob decided to send his beloved Joseph to the fields to know why his brothers had not returned home at their usual time; the slaves of the household were busy with their usual tasks and there was no one else to send at that moment. So Jacob dispatched Joseph upon the errand; the old man was really alarmed for his sons, who often quarrelled with their rough neighbors, the herdsmen of Shechem.

"Go, my son," said Jacob, "and learn whether all is well with your brethren. But first let me robe you like a prince." He brought out a new coat, a coat of many colors, and draped it upon Joseph's shoulders. The boy was delighted. He had never seen a cloak half so beautiful as his father's latest present, which glowed like the colors of the sunset sky and was so soft and delicate that it could be crushed and concealed in a child's hand. Now Joseph was glad enough to make the tire-

some journey to Shechem, for he loved fine raiment and wanted to show his new coat to his envious brothers.

"Ah," said Jacob proudly to his daughter Dinah, as they stood in the door of the Patriarch's tent watching the lad go up the winding road, "does not our Joseph carry himself like a prince?"

But Dinah was envious of Joseph and felt that her father did not treat his other children at all fairly. "You have pampered him so much that he sometimes actually thinks he is the son of a king instead of a simple shepherd," she answered as crossly as she dared. "Only yesterday he told his brothers and me that he had dreamed a dream of the fields in harvest time and that his sheaf wore a crown, while eleven other sheaves bowed down before it. Does he think that he is really a king and that his ten older brothers should be his slaves?"

Meanwhile the brothers had been so busy quarrelling over Joseph that they

had forgotten the lateness of the hour and delayed their journey toward home.

"I will endure his insolence no longer!" growled Simeon. "One day he dreams we are sheaves in the harvest field bowing down before him; another time that we are humble stars paying him tribute."

"Peace, peace!" said Reuben who, because he was the eldest, always tried to act as peacemaker. "He is but a child and will outgrow his folly."

Just at that moment they beheld Joseph coming down the yellow road, stepping daintily to save his sandals from the dust, and holding his glowing coat carefully about him. The brothers scowled at each other, for they were all covered with dirt and sweat. Although their father was a man of great wealth, they were clad as simply as the herdsmen of Shechem. But Joseph came to them fresh and cool and robed like a prince in his coat of many colors.

"See what my father has given me," he

cried gleefully as soon as he reached them, "a coat for a prince to wear at his bridal!" He danced among them as they sat in a circle in the shadow of a great rock; he spread the rich colors tauntingly before their angry eyes. "If you were our father's favorite," he teased Simeon, "you might wear one like it and spend the heat of the day in the shadow of my father's tent instead of watching his silly sheep from dawn till sunset."

Simeon's face reddened at the taunt; hardly knowing what he did, in his blind anger, he seized the cloak and tried to drag it from Joseph's shoulders. The delicate weave ripped and tore; Simeon stood staring at the piece in his hand, now thoroughly frightened. He knew Joseph would surely tell his father, who always punished any offence against the favorite. Desperate with fear he tore the cloak from the astonished boy and turned to his brothers.

"Brethren," he cried, "will you stand

by and see me insulted by this worthless idler who should be our slave rather than seek to lord it over us? Will you permit him to return to our father to complain of me that I may be cruelly punished?"

"No," cried all the brothers except Reuben, for they knew that Joseph was not always too careful to tell the whole truth when he complained to Jacob of their teasing. Seizing Joseph, they held him fast and waited Simeon's words.

"Slay him!" said Simeon, and the others agreed, all except Reuben and Judah. Reuben felt that as the eldest brother he would have to shoulder the responsibility for the crime; while Judah, although a harsh, impatient man, was the bravest of them all and thought that it would be a cowardly thing to slay Joseph when he stood weak and defenseless before them.

"Brethren," said Reuben in his quiet way, "do nothing hasty which we may repent as soon as it is accomplished. Cast

this lad into one of the pits dug here and let us sit down to eat and drink. While we are at meat there will be plenty of time to decide how we can dispose of the lad and turn aside our father's anger."

The brothers agreed with Reuben, who thought that he might be able to persuade them to leave Joseph all night in the pit, from which he hoped secretly to rescue him. The brothers bound Joseph and cast him into a pit, which dried up suddenly and from which God drove all the snakes; for when He heard Joseph cry out in distress, He took pity upon him and caused the serpents and other wild creatures to remain in their holes, as long as Joseph was imprisoned in the pit.

Reuben, as the eldest, divided the flat cakes of bread and passed the water cruse. He was about to intone the grace before the meal when Judah interrupted him. "How dare you utter the name of God," he asked, "when you plan to discuss a murder? Brothers, let us not stain our

hands with Joseph's blood. See, a caravan yonder on the way to Egypt. Let us signal the merchants and sell them our brother Joseph as a slave."

"Ah—our prince will become a slave!" sneered Simeon; he laughed in his beard, well pleased at the thought.

Naphtali sprang to his feet. Mounting a pile of rocks, he waved Joseph's torn cloak as a signal to the caravan, which approached slowly, the camels like dark leaves blown against the crimson sunset sky. The brothers were pleased with their own cunning, all but Reuben, who now had no means of saving Joseph and restoring him to his father.

It happened that the brothers were so absorbed in waiting for the caravan to approach that none of them perceived a company of merchants from Midian who had meanwhile approached them. God had brought them to the spot by sending birds to fly over the pit where Joseph lay; the merchants argued that the birds

meant there must be water near-by and hastened in that direction to fill their leathern bottles. Instead of water they were greatly surprised to find a beautiful lad cowering at the bottom of the pit. When they drew him out their astonishment increased, for the amulet which he wore about his neck grew from a tiny square of silk into a long and flowing garment, which covered him from neck to ankles. It had been the gift of Joseph's mother Rachel just before her death; now it grew longer that her son should not have to appear naked before these rude strangers from the desert.

It was Judah who first noticed the band of Midianitish merchants surrounding Joseph and exclaiming over his beauty. He advanced upon them sword in hand while his brothers followed.

"How dare you draw our slave out from the pit where we have just cast him for his disobedience?" he cried.

But the chief of the Midianites answer-

ed him with equal boldness. "More likely he is your master and you are his rebellious slaves," he answered. "In beauty and stature he excels all of you and seems a royal prince. We will take the lad away and none shall hinder us," and he signalled his companions to continue on their way.

Here Joseph tried to cry out that although he was not a prince he was the favorite son of a powerful sheik who would reward his captors generously for restoring him to his home. But God stopped his voice for the moment, for it was fated that Joseph should be carried to a far country, where he would one day serve his people in their need.

Now Simeon also drew his sword, and he and Judah led the brothers against the merchants from Midian. "Drop your hand from that lad's shoulder," said Simeon, "and restore our slave to us, or we will slay all of you and give your flesh to the birds of the air and the beasts of the field to devour."

His brothers wondered to hear him speak so boldly; they were all relieved when the chief of the Midianites bade his men drop their weapons and showed a desire to confer peaceably with them. "Why keep a rebellious slave?" asked he. "Rather sell him to us for five pieces of silver and be rid of him."

"Ten pieces," cried Gad, the greediest of all the brothers. "Have you not said yourself that he is more like a prince than a slave?"

"So be it—ten pieces of silver," agreed the chief and he began to loosen the strings of his money bag.

"It is not enough," said Gad, who immediately was sorry that he had not asked for more. "Pay us fifteen and he is yours."

"Fifteen," grumbled the chief of the merchants, beginning to count out the money.

"Twenty!" insisted Gad. "Such a slave you will be able to sell even to

Pharaoh, who will pay you thrice the sum you are paying us."

"Twenty pieces of silver," said the chief, "but no more—" and he pretended to close his money bag.

Gad held out his hand for the twenty pieces of silver, which he afterwards divided with much grumbling among his brothers. The Midianites bound Joseph with ropes and led him away. But the further they travelled, the more they wondered at Joseph's noble countenance and princely bearing and the more they feared that they had purchased not a slave but the son of a sheik powerful enough to punish them all with death.

By this time Joseph had recovered his voice and he begged them to return him to his father. But since the merchants had gone the greater part of their journey and were not altogether sure of the truth of his tale, they decided it would be better to dispose of him at once, so that no one might lay the crime at their door if

they had purchased a free man and not a slave.

It happened that they crossed the path of the very caravan which the brothers had sighted, a company of Ishmaelites whose camels were loaded with all kinds of sweet spices and perfumes. They were on the way to Egypt and purchased Joseph from the Midianite merchants for twenty pieces of silver. Then the Midianites went on their way, greatly relieved that they had disposed of their beautiful slave.

II

The Ishmaelites were a company of rude, rough men from the desert; they treated Joseph far less kindly than the merchants from Midian had done. At first when he wept, one of them, a little gentler than the rest, lifted the boy from his camel, thinking Joseph had grown stiff from riding and might be rested were he allowed to follow the caravan for a little

way on foot. But when Joseph instead of drying his tears wept and wailed louder than before, even he grew impatient and struck him.

Then the sky grew suddenly black, although a moment before it had been dusk, and there was a sound of thunder. The Ishmaelite who had threatened Joseph stood with his arm raised to strike him, but he could not move and became like a statue carved from stone. At first the Ishmaelites were frightened; then they laughed at themselves for fearing a sudden storm, so common in the desert country; while the man who had been punished with a stiff arm decided, as soon as he could move it again, that the stiffness was due to nothing more than the fatigue of the long journey. Reassuring themselves, they tethered their camels together, lit a fire, and prepared to encamp for the night.

They broke their fast and ate together, masters and slaves, as is the custom

among the desert people. But Joseph sat apart from the others, and when they offered him bread, he said: "My bread is the bread of sorrow." When they asked him to drink, he answered, "My only drink is tears." Then they mocked him for his downcast looks and left him to himself, while they told merry tales and sang old songs until the fire burned low and they all were sleeping around the glowing embers.

Joseph could not sleep; he lay stretched upon the ground, which he watered with his tears, kissing the soil he held sacred, for he had come to Ephrath and lay before the tomb where Rachel, his mother, was buried. Joseph's tears flowed afresh as he realized how she had loved him, and how his father had made him the favorite son for her sake.

"O mother, mother," cried Joseph, "when I was a little child and awoke in the night, you always ran to my couch to comfort me! You would lift me in your

kind arms and kiss me and soothe me to sleep again. But now I who was like a prince in my father's house, have been sold to these rude men for a slave. I may never look upon my father's face again. Yet when I cry to you in the darkness, you do not answer me and there is none to comfort me."

As Joseph lay there sobbing before his mother's grave, a voice seemed to come from the rocks, sweet and soft like far-off music. He knew it was his mother Rachel speaking and he was no longer afraid.

"Weep not, my son," said the voice of Rachel, "for I am always with you although you no longer feel my arms about you nor my kiss upon your cheek. God always hears the prayers of mothers. He will permit me to watch over you and comfort you in your distress. Do not forget that although you are torn from your father's house, God, who is also your Father, will watch over you and deliver you from all evil. Go down into Egypt with

your masters, my son, and do not be afraid any longer, for the Lord is with you."

Then the voice of Rachel ceased and there was no sound save the wind among the palm trees.

Joseph stretched out his arms and cried out his mother's name again and again; but this time there was no answer. The Ishmaelites were awakened by his mourning and in their anger they beat him most severely. Then the earth seemed to shake with thunder, and great, ragged streaks of lightning ripped across the sky. Every man in the caravan stood rigid as stone except the slaves, who had not mistreated Joseph.

"Alas," cried he who had tried to befriend Joseph at the beginning of the journey, "this misfortune has surely come upon us because this slave is blest with magical strength and no man may raise his hand against him. Let us rid ourselves of him at once lest he bring us all to death."

During the rest of the journey no man dared raise his hand against Joseph; there was fair weather and not a man of the caravan was again afflicted in any way. As a rule the Ishmaelites loaded their camels with pitch and the skins of beasts, which they sold in the markets of Egypt; but on this day they carried all manner of sweet-smelling spices, and the perfume was wafted over the land so enticingly that even the nobles of the country came out to see what the strange merchants had to sell. Among them was Potiphar, a noble high in favor with Pharaoh himself. He was so charmed with Joseph's grace and beauty that he purchased Joseph for his slave; it was in his house that Joseph dwelt until the wife of Potiphar plotted against him and had him thrown into prison.

III

As soon as Joseph's new masters had led him away, his brothers began to feel

remorse over their deed, for they did not know how they would dare to face their bereaved father. Hoping to shield themselves, they agreed upon a story which they hoped would deceive him; then they took a solemn oath to keep the story of their crime against Joseph a secret from all men and to put to the sword the man who should betray them. Dipping Joseph's beautiful coat of many colors in the blood of a kid, they brought the blood-stained garment to their father Jacob and told him his favorite son had been devoured by some beast of prey.

Jacob mourned in sackcloth, with ashes upon his head; he lamented day and night that he himself had sent Joseph to his death, since Jacob believed that it was upon the road to Shechem that Joseph had been slain. He bade his sons take their swords and their bows and arrows and search through the fields, first that they might find Joseph's body and bring it home for burial, and

after that for the beast which had killed him.

The brothers pretended to search for Joseph's body and when they returned unsuccessful, they pretended to join Jacob in his grief that the poor comfort of giving Joseph a decent burial had been denied to him. Later they caught a wolf which they brought back alive to Jacob, saying: "Here is the first wild beast we have encountered. Perhaps he has slain Joseph."

When Jacob approached the bound wolf with a knife in his hand, ready to slay him, God took pity upon the helpless animal and granted him human speech.

"Do not be angry at me!" cried the wolf, shedding human tears. "I have not slain your son. As the Lord liveth, I have never seen your Joseph. I have just come from a far land, seeking my own cub which I fear has been slain by the hunters. He has disappeared and I know not whether he be alive or dead, and for ten days I have searched for him in vain.

This day while I was searching for him your sons seized me and brought me before you. If you punish me with death, know that I die guiltless of the death of your son."

Then Jacob released the wolf from the ropes that bound him; but the wolf would not leave his side. "Let me remain in your tent and serve you," said the wolf, "for I am as lonely as you without my cub."

Jacob gladly consented and the wolf remained with him in his tent until the end of his days. The wolf followed Jacob by day like a favorite dog, sleeping at night at the foot of Jacob's couch. When Jacob stirred in his sleep and cried out Joseph's name, the faithful animal would rise and howl mournfully, as though remembering his own loss. For many years it was told among the herdsmen of Jacob that no wild beast dared disturb the flock as long as the wolf lived, for he was very strong and would allow no

beast of the field to approach his master's kids and sheep.

Sometimes Jacob wondered whether Joseph was indeed dead. Once he went up into the mountains and with his own hands hewed twelve stones out of the quarry and wrote the names of his sons on the stones, one name on every stone. He bade the stones bow down to the stone marked with Reuben's name; but they did not move. Nor did a single stone stir when in turn he bade them bow down to those marked with the names of his other sons. But when he came to the stone marked with Joseph's name, the other stones rose in their places and bowed down before it like subjects before a king. Jacob remembered how Joseph had dreamed of his brothers paying him homage and he felt a little comforted although he still feared that his favorite son was dead.

It was at this time that the brothers of Joseph set out for Egypt, for the granaries

of Egypt were said to be full, although the rest of the world lacked bread. On the road to Egypt they decided among themselves that if they found their brother Joseph in the land whither they had sent him as a slave, they would either buy him for any price or use force to secure his freedom. They were now ashamed of the evil deed they had done against their brother, and their father's lasting sadness was a constant punishment to them.

When they entered the city of Mizraim, an Egyptian officer stopped them at the gate and demanded their names and the names of their father and their father's father. For Joseph, who had risen high in Pharaoh's favor and was now governor over all Egypt, had devised this plan that he might immediately be informed of his brothers' arrival in Mizraim, should they come to Egypt to buy corn. So the brothers gave their names, one after

another, and the names of their father Jacob and their grandfather Isaac.

Every evening Joseph himself went over these lists, his heart heavy with disappointment not to meet his brothers' names, for he was homesick for his brethren and for news of home. He dwelt like a prince in the court of Pharaoh, with a hundred slaves to do his slightest bidding; but often he longed for the black goathair tent of his father and the simple service of the handmaidens. In Egypt skilled musicians played before him and servants brought him the richest foods, sweet wines and glowing fruits piled high on golden platters; but Joseph often sighed as he remembered the songs of the shepherds of his own country, and the bread and dates and goats' milk his sister Dinah had once set before him for his evening meal.

Now Joseph's heart rejoiced to see that his brothers' names were listed among those who had come to Egypt. He at once

gave orders that all stations which had been established to sell corn to foreigners should be closed, save one, and at that one the names of all newcomers should be recorded; also that the brothers should be seized and brought before him as soon as they appeared.

For three days the lists at the one station where corn was still sold to foreigners did not contain the names of Joseph's brothers. In their eagerness to learn whether their brother still dwelt in Egypt as a slave, the brothers neglected to buy corn and went from street to street asking all they met for news of a beautiful slave boy from Canaan. But no one could tell them of Joseph, for he had not disclosed his real name or the name of his father or his birthplace to anyone while he was a slave.

On the third day the brothers appeared at the station to buy corn; for now they felt that their search was futile and that Joseph was indeed dead. Sixteen servants

from Joseph's household seized them. The brothers could not guess why they had been seized so rudely; they were indignant and perplexed. But Reuben said: "Did we not put bonds upon our own brother? Why should we complain when the Egyptians who do not know us or our father treat us with suspicion?"

The simple men of the desert could not speak for astonishment and admiration when they entered the palace of Joseph, governor over Egypt. The first hall through which they passed was hung with green and seemed like the depths of a cool forest after the burning heat of the streets outside; the second hall was of black marble hung with curtains of blue, the ceiling also was of blue, and on it were fashioned in silver the moon and many stars so that it appeared like a moonlit night; while the third hall in which Joseph sat and gave judgment was red and gold like the glowing heart of a ruby; his throne also was of gold and silver and set with all

manner of precious stones, forming a picture of the river Nile and the whole land of Egypt. Joseph sat upon this throne apparelled in robes of byssus and purple, a crown of gold upon his head and a chain heavy with rubies, the gift of Pharaoh himself, about his neck. So terrible did he look in his splendor and beauty, with his mighty warriors surrounding him, that the brothers prostrated themselves before him and did not dare to raise their heads until Joseph's chamberlain bade them rise. Even then they did not recognize their brother, for he had been a slender youth when they sold him into slavery; now he was a bearded man and crowned with gold and robed in purple.

Joseph recognized his brothers at once; he longed to rush down from his throne and embrace them and ask for news of his father. But God desired that they should be well punished before Joseph forgave them, so He sent an angel down to

whisper in Joseph's ear: "These men have not fully repented the sin they worked against you when you were but a lad. Punish them a little that they may truly grieve for their wickedness."

The radiant messenger disappeared as quickly as he had come. Joseph was astonished; but he realized that the Lord had sent him this counsellor and he decided to obey. The brothers thought they saw only one of Joseph's advisors speaking and later believed that he had warned Joseph against them.

For now Joseph turned to them sternly and struck his signet ring smartly against his wine cup that stood upon a small table near his throne, a cup of gold set with gems and, like the chain about his neck, a gift from Pharaoh himself. He pretended to listen to the cup as a man does to a magic stone or amulet; at last he said: "By my magic cup I know that you have come to Egypt as spies."

The other brothers were enraged at

this insult, but Reuben answered courteously: "Nay, my lord, your servants have come from Canaan into Egypt only to buy corn for their hungry families."

"But you have not come as honest men," cried Joseph, "for my watchers at the gates of the city tell me that you entered Mizraim each through a separate gate."

"My lord suspects his servants unjustly," explained Reuben, "for what we did we did at our father's command and for a worthy purpose. We are all the sons of one father and he thought it might arouse suspicion if we entered a city together. For the inhabitants might well say, 'Why do these men travel in a company unless they plot some secret evil among themselves? They are all strong and powerful and may be robbers banded together to seize by force what they fancy the most!' "

"That may be true," said Joseph, "but why did you not come straight to buy

corn instead of hiding for three days in order to devise plots against the people of this land?"

"My lord," said Reuben, "we are twelve brothers, the sons of Jacob. The youngest, Benjamin, is with our father in Canaan since he will not trust him out of his sight. For Benjamin is our father's one comfort since our brother Joseph was stolen away and sold into slavery. All these years we have believed Joseph to dwell in Egypt and we hoped that when we came here we should be able to find him and buy him from his master."

"And if his master would not sell him we would slay his master and carry him away by force," cried Judah. He half drew his sword as he spoke, for he was an impatient man and it angered him that he and his brothers had been treated so harshly.

Joseph realized that his brothers were not yet ready to confess their fault against him and that Judah was still a man of

violent deeds. He pretended great anger and cried out in a fierce voice: "Did I not say that you were men of cunning and of blood? I am now certain that you have come to Egypt not, as you pretend, in order to search for your lost brother, but that you might have a chance to quarrel with the men of Mizraim, to rob and to slay them."

He cast them all into prison, where they were guarded by seventy of Joseph's trusty soldiers. There they remained for three days. Then Joseph visited them, offering them their freedom on condition that they would leave one of their number as hostage while they returned home for Benjamin. "Let the little lad tell me that you have spoken truly of your errand to Egypt and I will believe him," said Joseph.

He decided that Simeon must remain behind as hostage, for he felt that Simeon, who had treated him the worst, should bear the heaviest punishment. So the

brothers returned to Canaan that they might fetch back Benjamin, and Joseph waited impatiently to look again on the face of his dearest brother.

The news of Joseph's severity toward the men from Canaan had spread over the entire city. His wife Asenath heard of his cruelty to the men of Canaan, and reproached him. Then Joseph told Asenath for the first time the story of the coat of many colors, of the envy of his brothers and how they had sold him to the wandering merchants. He wept to think of his father grieving for him in far-off Canaan. Asenath wept also and prayed that Joseph might soon look upon his father's face again and receive his dear blessing.

Asenath was now a worshipper of the one God and no longer worshipped the many gods of the Egyptians. When a baby she had been left under a thorn bush where she would surely have died of cold and hunger, had not the angel Gab-

riel carried her to the house of Potiphar in Egypt. Potiphar, a rich man and counsellor of Pharaoh, had no children, and he and his wife brought up the child as their own daughter. She soon surpassed all the other maidens of Egypt in beauty. Many suitors came to woo her, even Pharaoh's eldest son. Her father desired her to wed Joseph since he was the first man in the land of Egypt after Pharaoh. At first Asenath refused even to meet him since he had been a slave and a prisoner; but when she saw Joseph she loved him and gladly consented to be his wife.

Now Joseph knew that Asenath was not only a worshipper of idols like the other Egyptians, but that she spent long hours in her apartments praying to her false gods and presenting them with offerings. He refused to consider her as his wife; but when she wept, his heart was softened and he blessed her, saying, "May the God of my father receive you among my people."

Then Asenath, still weeping and ashamed, retired to her apartments and for eight days would see no one except her handmaidens who joined her in her lamentations. She removed her rich garments and golden ornaments and clothed herself in sackcloth; she sprinkled her long, beautiful hair with ashes, as she sat upon the ground, mourning that she had served the gods whom Joseph scorned and despised. Her costly robes and jewels were sold and the money given to the poor; with her own hands she destroyed her idols of silver and gold, bidding her handmaidens sell the ornaments with which she had decked them and give the proceeds to the needy.

Even then she did not dare to pray to the God of Joseph's father; she feared that He would not receive her after her long worship of idols. But at the end of the eighth day she said to herself: "This unknown God is not like the gods of the Egyptians; He is a loving Father and will

receive me and care for me." She poured out her heart in prayer. For the first time since Joseph had rebuked her she felt comforted, ceased weeping and fell into a deep sleep.

When she awoke it was morning and there in the golden sun stood a shining figure which seemed to have the face of Joseph; but she knew it was an angel and bowed down in reverence. It was the angel Michael, captain of the hosts of the Lord: his eyes seemed like flashes of lightning. But his voice was gentle as he told her not to be afraid.

The angel Michael ordered Asenath to array herself in new and splendid garments, for her time of grieving was over. He brought her a basin of pure water with which she washed her face, all disfigured with ashes and tears. When her toilet was completed, her beauty now surpassed her former beauty as her loveliness had once exceeded the loveliness of the other daughters of Egypt. Then Michael pre-

sented Asenath to Joseph who received her gladly. They were wed the next day and Pharaoh himself gave the wedding feast and placed golden crowns upon their heads. Pharaoh also invited all the princes of the land to the ceremonies, which lasted seven days, during which time no man in Egypt dared do any work on pain of death.

Asenath went to live in the house of Joseph; with him she worshipped his God and thought of his people as her people. She now longed to see Jacob almost as sorely as his own child did, for she wished to receive his blessing; she wished also to have him bless the two fair sons Manasseh and Ephraim whom she had borne to Joseph: two youths whose names were never to be forgotten among the people of Israel.

After many days the brothers of Joseph returned to Egypt; they brought with them Benjamin from whom Jacob had parted with many tears and misgivings.

Benjamin, the youngest son, had grown to be the dearest child of Jacob's old age, now that he counted Joseph among the dead, and the old man feared to part with him. But his sons had persuaded him, saying, "Unless we bring Benjamin with us, this lord of Egypt will refuse to sell us corn for our starving families." Then Jacob kissed Benjamin and blessed him and bade him go with his brothers to Egypt.

When the sons of Jacob all stood before Joseph, Joseph longed to embrace Benjamin and make himself known to him. But he felt that he must test his brothers still further before he fully forgave them for the wrong they had done him. That is the reason why he ordered his steward to slip a costly silver cup, a wedding gift of Pharaoh, into Benjamin's sack, when the brothers were ready to leave Egypt with their bags of grain upon their shoulders. But the brothers did not desert Benjamin in his trouble, as Joseph had

feared they might do. Instead they all pleaded long and earnestly that Benjamin who, they all declared, was innocent should be released. They even offered to go to prison in his stead if Joseph still insisted upon punishing him for the theft of the cup. "For we dare not go home to our father," said Judah, "unless we bring the lad with us."

Joseph's heart was touched and he sent all the slaves and people of his household from the room and said: "Do you not know me? I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt." Then he forgave them and embraced them in turn and they all wept together.

IV

Joseph treated his brethren with much kindness and loaded them with all manner of gifts; he gave each of them two changes of raiment, but to Benjamin, whom he loved the best, he gave five; he also gave them rings for their ears and golden

ornaments. He bade them set out at once for Canaan, loading them with gifts for his father, and bidding them clothe Jacob like a king before they brought him back to Egypt.

On the road from Egypt to Canaan, the brothers debated among themselves how they could best tell their father that Joseph, whom he had long mourned as dead, was alive and well and as mighty as a king. They knew that sudden joy like sudden grief is sometimes too hard for a mortal man to bear; they realized that their father was old and worn with grieving for his lost Joseph.

As they came in sight of the black tents where Jacob lived with his sons and their families and his servants, they spied Serah, the beautiful daughter of Asher, about to enter her grandfather's tent to play for him upon her harp. Serah was a skilful harp player and her voice was the sweetest of all the maidens of the house of Jacob.

Asher called his daughter to him and hastily told her what had occurred in Egypt and what he desired her to do. She hastened to her grandfather and sat at his feet; but she did not begin to play at once although he urged her to sing him one of the songs the shepherds sing at the sheep-shearing. Instead she played so softly upon her harp that the music seemed as faint as the trickle of far-off waters. Then she asked him gently:

"Grandfather, is it true that before I was born you had a son, Joseph, whom you clothed like a prince in a coat of many colors?"

"Yes, my child," answered Jacob sadly. The tears began to flow down his withered cheeks, for he could never speak of his son without weeping.

"Why have I never seen him?" asked Serah, still speaking and playing softly. "Has he gone to a distant country?"

"Yes, my child," Jacob told her, "to a far-away country from which no man may

return. For my best beloved son Joseph is dead, and although I may some day go to him, he will nevermore return to me."

Then Serah struck a joyful chord upon her harp; she sang at first softly, then louder and louder: "Joseph lives and he rules over the whole of Egypt."

"Do not mock me, my child," cried Jacob.

But Serah continued to sing in a voice of triumph:

"Joseph lives. He has become a prince of Egypt. Joseph has become the first of his brethren, for his dreams were true dreams, and those who once mocked him now seek to kiss the dust beneath his feet."

While she sang, the brothers of Joseph entered the tent very softly, wearing the splendid garments Joseph had given them. They bore the rich gifts of silver and gold Joseph had sent to his father.

"Joseph lives and has become a prince of Egypt!" they sang with Serah. Judah

slipped about his father's shoulders the robe of purple and gold Joseph had sent him from his own wardrobe; Simeon placed a golden circlet upon the old man's white head; Benjamin dropped a chain heavy with jewels about his neck and kissed him as he said:

"Help us to rejoice, O my father! For Joseph, my dearest brother, is indeed alive. He sends you these gifts. The words which this child sang are true."

Jacob blessed Serah because he had first heard the good tidings from her lips. "My daughter," he said, "because you brought me this message of life, may death never have power over you." This blessing was fulfilled: Serah grew to be a very old woman in the land of Egypt, whither she went with her father and the others of the house of Jacob to visit Joseph; she lived long enough to grieve over the hard lot her people suffered as slaves in that far-away land. But she never lost hope that some day a deliverer

would come for the Hebrews, and she was rewarded at last when she looked upon the face of Moses and knew that he would save the Israelites. Then she was satisfied and prayed for rest and her eyes closed in death.

Jacob and the members of his family now prepared to set out for Egypt, because Jacob could not bear a moment's delay in his desire to see his son whom he had long mourned as dead. But first they were obliged to attend a three day banquet prepared in Jacob's honor by the king of Canaan and his court; presents were exchanged and Jacob's old neighbors vied with each other in doing him courtesies and wishing him all success on his journey.

Wearing the pearl-embroidered turban Joseph had sent to him, and borne upon the arms of his sons, who feared that he would become too tired if he attempted to make the journey in any other way, Jacob set out for Egypt.

When news came that the caravan of the sons of Jacob was in sight, Joseph arrayed himself in his robes of byssus and purple, putting upon his head Pharaoh's own crown which the ruler had sent his favorite for that one occasion. He went forth to meet his father, followed by a procession of countless servants who marched to the sound of all sorts of musical instruments; while the women of Egypt climbed upon the roofs of the houses and the walls of the city, ready to greet Jacob with the sound of cymbals and timbrels.

Fearing to shock his aged father by coming upon him too suddenly, Joseph first sent his eldest son, then his youngest, followed by five horsemen, to greet his father. In this way the old sheik was prepared to meet his favorite son.

When Jacob at last took Joseph in his arms, he praised the God of his people who had permitted him to live through the long, lonely years that he might look

upon his son's face before he died. Tenderly Joseph lifted the old man into his chariot. Resting upon soft cushions, surrounded by attentive slaves, greeted by the whole multitude of Egypt, the simple sheik from Canaan entered the land of Pharaoh.

As the retinue of Joseph passed within the city's walls, Joseph glanced back across the sands toward far-off Canaan which had once been his home. Across the rim of the desert moved tiny black blotches, camels of a caravan from distant lands. For a moment Joseph forgot that he was a mighty prince in Egypt, just a little below Pharaoh himself. He remembered only how as a timid, broken slave-boy, friendless and without hope, he had entered the unknown land upon the bank of the river Nile.

THE SHEPHERD OF THE WILDERNESS

III

THE SHEPHERD OF THE WILDERNESS

After Joseph died in the land of Egypt, a new Pharaoh came to the throne, who hated and feared the children of Israel and made them all his slaves. He set them to work in the brickyards from dawn until late at night, where many died beneath the cruel whips of the taskmasters. Even this did not satisfy Pharaoh. He did not fear the women and girls among his slave people; but he dreaded the time when the youths should grow old enough to fight for their own freedom. That is why he gave orders that every boy born among the Hebrews should be put to death the hour that he first saw the light of day. But Pharaoh failed in his wicked plan just as Nimrod had failed in the days

of Abraham. Many a Hebrew mother as soon as her little son was born, crept from her house into the fields and left the child there, trusting that God would not let it die. God sent angels to care for the helpless children of the fields who grew sturdy and strong much earlier than ordinary children. These babies did not require bottles of warm milk and crusts of bread to chew; they were entirely satisfied when the angels gave them smooth pebbles to suck; and no wonder, for from one pebble they sucked milk, from the other honey. God even provided them with clothing and caused their hair to grow down to their feet; so they never suffered from the cold, and the angels were spared the trouble of washing little socks and blankets and petticoats from morning till night. To be sure, when night came, the little waifs missed their mothers; but the angels sang them lullabies and gave them glow worms to play with before they fell asleep for the night.

These children of the field very soon learned to outwit their enemies, the fierce soldiers who came to look for them. As soon as they saw the tall men with flashing swords and helmets, the children would scuttle to their holes like so many prairie dogs and remain hidden in the ground until the soldiers had gone to another field. If they did not have time to run away the little ones would lie close against the ground, all keeping so very quiet that not even the keenest eye could distinguish their hairy little bodies from the brown clods of earth. But as soon as the soldiers had passed on, the little ones would run out of their hiding place and dance merrily together, laughing and singing over their fortunate escape. They made a pretty picture dancing in a ring in the fields, especially under a full moon, and they always sang very sweetly, since the angels themselves had taught them. It was these children who were chosen to lead the procession of singing Hebrews as

they passed out of Egypt years later, a free people.

But Jochebed, the mother of Moses, was bolder than her neighbors and dared to keep her child with her for almost three months. Then, instead of leaving him in the fields, she set him afloat in a little basket upon the river Nile. Fortunately for Moses and the Hebrews, Bithiah, Pharaoh's beautiful daughter, found the basket while taking her morning bath. She brought the child to her father and begged to be allowed to rear him in the palace. Several of the royal astrologers warned Pharaoh that this Hebrew child might grow up to avenge the wrongs of his people; but Pharaoh spared his life and bade the princess keep the boy.

Pharaoh did not forget the warnings of his astrologers; when Moses was about three years old he would have slain him, had it not been for the prayers of the princess, who now loved him as her son. Moses by this time had grown into such

an attractive child, that Pharaoh himself often sent for him; he would try to forget the cares of state by fondling the boy and listening to his prattle. One day the boy sat upon Bithiah's knee at Pharaoh's left hand, while the proud Queen Alfar'anit sat at his right. The child Moses suddenly lunged forward and snatched the golden crown from Pharaoh's head. The court turned pale with horror; Pharaoh, trembling with rage, turned to his guards and ordered them to take the child to his death.

But Bithiah flung herself upon her knees before her father and begged him to forgive the lad for his crime. He is only a child," cried the princess, "and he reached for your sacred crown in play, just as he often reaches for my glittering headband or the gold chain about my neck."

"Nay, O Pharaoh," said Balaam, the chief of the royal astrologers, "do not spare this child, for he is a Hebrew and the Hebrews are filled with strange wisdom from childhood. Although he is still

only a baby, he has done this thing with a wisdom far beyond his years. He already chooses for himself the kingdom and the crown of Egypt."

Pharaoh again threatened the child with death; but he at last yielded to the entreaties of his daughter Bithiah and consented to call together all the wise men of his kingdom to decide whether the child had really planned to seize the royal crown and was worthy of death. When the wise men appeared before the throne to render judgment, Gabriel, the friend of little children, appeared among them, disguised as a very old man with snow white hair and a long beard that almost reached to the floor.

"If it please Pharaoh," proposed Gabriel, "let the child be placed on trial. Put before him a coal of fire and an onyx stone. If he avoids the fire which all children love and reaches for the precious stone, then he is indeed a child of dreadful wisdom and you should slay him be-

fore he brings you harm. But if he stretches out his hand toward the glowing coal as any senseless child of his age would do, then we will know that he has grasped your crown in ignorance, and you must surely permit him to live."

Pharaoh was pleased with the plan and ordered his slaves to set before the child an onyx stone and a brazier of burning coals. The princess knelt beside him, praying to all her gods to guide the child aright; the court waited breathless and expectant. The child's little fingers wavered a moment; they seemed about to grasp the onyx stone; for Moses was indeed a child wise beyond his years, and he already knew the danger of the tempting coals. But an unseen hand guided his hand to the hot coal within the glowing brazier. Moses seized the coal and, crying aloud in his pain, thrust his burned hand into his mouth. The coal scorched his mouth, and from that day he became slow of speech.

II

After that day Moses was in no danger in the court of Egypt; he might have remained there for the rest of his life in peace and luxury, enjoying the love of the kind princess and the friendship of Pharaoh himself. But one day a feeling of great compassion for the wretched sons of Israel rose in his heart and he learned in some mysterious way that he was also a Hebrew. From that hour he knew no peace and tried to lighten the burdens of his unhappy brethren. At last he slew an Egyptian taskmaster who was abusing a Hebrew slave, and was forced to flee into the wilderness.

It happened that among the astrologers who had been present when Pharaoh considered putting the child Moses to death there was a wise and noble man named Jethro, a priest of Midian. For many years Jethro had been a worshipper of idols; but when he returned from

Egypt to the wilderness of Sinai his heart became filled with the knowledge of the one God and he felt that he could no longer serve the gods of his fathers. He did not dare to tell his people of the change that had come over him, for he feared their wrath. Instead he told them that he felt too old to serve as their priest any longer. Then he withdrew further into the hill country with his seven daughters, all of them fair women; and the fairest of them all was Zipporah.

Her name signifies a bird and she was like a bird in the fleetness and grace of every movement; her hair when unbound reached to her ankles; her eyes were like wells of light. But few saw them, for she was a shy maiden and always kept them modestly fixed to the ground.

When Jethro restored to the elders of his people his priestly robes and the vessels in which he had been accustomed to offer up incense to their idols, the people guessed why he would no longer

act as priest. They drove him from their midst with stones and curses.

"Yea, seek shelter in the wilderness," they cried. "Tend your own flocks and draw your own water and hew your own firewood. From this day no man in Midian will dare to aid in any way a despiser of our gods."

Jethro, although a rich man, could hire no one to attend to the many duties he himself had grown too old to perform. He was forced to set his daughters at hard tasks suitable only for strong men; although they had been reared delicately, they were obliged even to drive the flocks to the well every morning and evening.

One spring evening when the setting sun seemed to crown the peaks of Sinai with fire, Zipporah and her sisters drove their flocks down the twisted paths to the well which was used by all the people of Midian. They always tried to come early because they feared to encounter their old neighbors, who would greet them with

surly words and even with threats against their father. But to-night a number of shepherds from Midian were already at the well.

These rude men waited until the maidens had filled and refilled the heavy bucket many times and filled the watering trough for their flocks to drink; then they came boldly forward, pushed the flocks of Jethro aside and began to water their own sheep. All of the other daughters of Jethro cried out in anger and even strove with the shepherds; but the maiden Zipporah stood modestly aside and said: "Sisters, sisters, do not struggle with these evil men. It is better that we should be delayed in our evening task than that we should continue such unseemly strife."

"You speak truly, maiden," said a voice in her ear. "These men should not be permitted to wage war upon delicate women; only a man should punish them for their rudeness."

Zipporah looked up and saw standing

beside her a stranger dressed in the rich robes of an Egyptian courtier; there were gold bands upon his strong arms and a jewelled chain hung low upon his broad chest. Beside him the sturdy shepherds appeared like weak boys.

The stranger strode in their midst, and with one blow threw their leader to the ground. "It may be the custom in Midian to mistreat weak women," he said in a voice of thunder, "but it is not so in Egypt."

While the shepherds stood abashed and frightened before him, the stranger drew the bucket from the well and again filled the watering trough which the sheep of the villagers had half emptied during the struggle. He bade Jethro's daughters water their flocks; when the sheep were satisfied, he again filled the long trough and ordered the shepherds to allow the sheep to satisfy their thirst.

"Let the lazy ruffians draw their own water," complained Zipporah's youngest

sister, Marah, a tiny girl with a long and bitter tongue.

"I do not wish the poor sheep to wait even a moment because of their masters' rudeness," answered the stranger. All marvelled at his gentleness. Zipporah marvelled more than the others; she had lifted her eyes from the ground long enough to observe that the stranger, although he had emptied the bucket into the watering trough many times, had not been obliged to refill the vessel. In this way she knew that he was a man beloved of God and a worker of wonders.

When the sheep were all watered, the tall stranger turned to Zipporah and prepared to bid her farewell. But she detained him with pleasant words and asked him to accompany her and her sisters home that their father might thank him for his courtesy.

"I shall be glad to go to your home with you," answered he, "not to receive your

father's thanks, but to guard you against these rude shepherds."

They walked together, a little apart from the other sisters; the stranger perceived that Zipporah's words were as sensible and modest as her face was beautiful. "Maiden," he said to her, "if your father desires to reward me for the slight service I have done you and your sisters, will you be angry if I ask him for your hand in marriage as payment?"

"No," answered Zipporah, "but I fear my father will never consent. Many suitors have already asked him for my hand in marriage and to all of them he has made the same answer."

"What was that?" asked the stranger.

"He has always told them that no man may wed one of his daughters unless he first can draw from the ground the rod that grows in my father's garden. This rod, says my father, God Himself created in the twilight of the first Sabbath eve and gave to Adam. Adam, the father of

all living, gave it to Enoch at his death; from Enoch it descended to Noah, then to Noah's favorite son, Shem; Abraham was the next owner, then Isaac and finally the patriarch Jacob. Jacob brought the magic rod with him to Egypt, and just before his death gave it to the beloved Joseph.

"When Joseph died, the Egyptians, who had long feared and hated him for his power, broke into his palace and robbed it of its treasures. One of them stole this magic rod of sapphire and carried it to Pharaoh as a gift. There is no other rod like it in all the world, for it can perform wonders and upon it are engraved the name of God that no man may speak and the names of the ten plagues which He will send some day upon Egypt.

"My father, who was then one of the sacred Scribes of Pharaoh's court, caught sight of the rod; he resolved that it should not remain in the hands of a worshipper of idols, for by that time my father had

come to know of the one God. So my father stole the rod from Pharaoh at the risk of his life; he carried it away with him when he returned home to Midian.

"For many years it lay in my father's house. One day he was walking in his garden, carrying it in his hand; it dropped upon the ground and became instantly rooted to the spot. He attempted to draw it forth again, but it had already sprouted and was putting forth blossoms. This is the rod with which he tests any suitor who comes to our house. Until this day not even the strongest man in Midian has been able to draw the rod from the ground and lay it before my father."

"But I will try!" cried the stranger. "And if I succeed, will you wed me?"

"I have always tried to please my father. If you are successful in his test and he desires me to wed you, I will obey him gladly," promised Zipporah.

But as soon as Jethro saw the stranger from Egypt his heart grew cold with fear.

Zipporah had whispered to him the miracle of the bucket at the well; this, together with the man's lofty stature and royal air, caused the old astrologer to remember sayings and signs he had almost forgotten. Still he allowed the stranger to go out into his garden to test his strength. For Jethro said to himself: "If this man fails like the others, I need not give him my daughter and I can send him away. But if he is able to bring the rod to me, then I will know that he is different from other men, and, rather than trust my daughter to a magician, I will surely slay him."

The young man and the maiden went out into the garden; Zipporah watched him, scarcely daring to breathe, so great was her anxiety. As he put out his hand for the sapphire rod growing there, its transparent white blossoms all fair and silvery in the moonlight, the rod swayed before him as before its master; without the slightest difficulty the young stranger drew it from the ground.

Jethro paled when the man from Egypt stood again before him, bearing the sapphire rod in triumph. "What is your name?" he demanded. "And whose son are you?"

"I do not know the name of my father," answered the young man, "and the only mother that I have ever known is my foster mother, the princess Bithiah, daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt. She saved me from the river Nile and gave me the name Moses, which signifies, 'drawn from the waters'."

By these words Jethro knew that the young man was that champion of Israel of whom the sages and astrologers had warned their ruler in days gone by. He knew also that the man who would serve his people must tread a hard and thorny road with no thanks from those he serves, but sometimes at the end the dungeon or the gibbet. Because he feared that his best beloved daughter Zipporah would be unhappy as the wife of such a man, he resolved to prevent their marriage.

Very craftily he congratulated Moses upon his success; he ordered Zipporah and her sisters to spread a banquet before them that they might make merry in honor of the approaching marriage. Unseen by all but Zipporah, who could not warn her lover in time, he drugged Moses' wine cup as they ate and drank together. Moses fell into a heavy sleep; Jethro and all his daughters, save Zipporah who wept and pleaded in vain, carried him out into the garden and flung him into a dry cistern. Then Jethro went to sleep, well pleased with himself for saving his daughter from a life of grief and exile.

Zipporah was a maiden wise beyond her years. When she saw that her tears did not persuade her father, she at once dried her eyes and began to lay plans for rescuing her promised husband. She knew that she could not depend upon her sisters, who had always hated her for her great beauty, and now envied her as the first to become a bride. By morning she

had decided how she would be able to preserve Moses' life without assistance from anyone.

"Father," she said the next morning, "will you listen to my counsel, although I am only a young maiden and you are crowned with years and wisdom? You have no wife to keep the house, our mother being dead, but only seven daughters. Since no shepherd will serve you, we ourselves must pasture the sheep. Would it not be better that my six sisters took the sheep to pasture, while I remained at home to prepare the family meals and keep the house in order?"

"You are my dutiful daughter, always willing to serve me," answered Jethro. "It shall be as you wish."

After that the other sisters, all grumbling at the harder task, went daily to the pasture with the flocks, while Zipporah remained at home to look after the affairs of the household. Every morning, as soon as her sisters were out of sight, she would

slip out into the garden with a basket of choice morsels, which she had saved from the evening meal of the day before. She would lower this basket down into the cistern that Moses might eat and drink. So for seven years Moses did not suffer although kept a prisoner through the will of Jethro.

At the end of seven years Zipporah ventured to speak to her father of Moses. "O my father," she asked him, "have you never thought of the poor stranger that you cast into the dry cistern in our garden seven years ago?"

But Jethro, who was now a very old man, seldom remembered at sunset what had happened in the morning. "I do not know what you are talking about," he told Zipporah. Neither she nor her father guessed that it was God's will that Moses was forced to remain in bondage for seven long years. It had seemed best to God to keep him hidden; not only to save him from Pharaoh's officers who had sought

him in every land; but that Moses, who had ever been of a hot and impatient nature, should learn patience and forbearance.

Jethro, when his daughter recalled the handsome stranger from Egypt to his mind, ordered her and her sisters to lower a ladder into the cistern. When Moses climbed to the top and Jethro perceived how strong and rugged he still was after his supposed privations, he exclaimed: "Now I know that you are surely beloved by the one God and that you are he who is destined to deliver Israel out of Egypt." He embraced Moses and gave him the sapphire rod for a wedding gift. It was this rod which Moses later used to cleave the Red Sea, when he led the Israelites out of Egypt. With it Moses was able to draw water from the rock and perform other miracles.

Moses and the beautiful Zipporah were married, and Moses became his father-in-law's shepherd. Every day he took the

sheep to pasture; every night he drove them to the watering trough. He led the young animals to pasture first, that they might have the tenderest, juiciest grass for their food; the sheep that were a little older he led next to graze herbs; finally he drove forth the sturdiest sheep to eat the hard grass that was left. God saw how careful Moses was with the sheep and He said: "He that understands how to pasture sheep, providing for each what is good for it, shall some day pasture My people of Israel."

Yet God remembered how impatient Moses had always been, how he had even slain the Egyptian in his wrath. But one day God perceived how when a kid escaped from a flock and led Moses a long and hard chase over the rocks until he found it again, the good shepherd did not strike the little creature or even speak harshly to it. For Moses saw that the kid stopped at all the water courses and he said: "Poor creature! I did not know that you were

so thirsty that you were obliged to run away to find water. Now drink your fill. And when you are satisfied I will carry you back to the flock because you must be overtired from your long climb in the hills." Speaking kindly to the frightened kid, Moses lifted it from the ground and carried it back to the herd upon his shoulders.

"If Moses is so patient and tender to his flock," thought God, "He will surely be a faithful shepherd for Israel."

On another day God heard Moses cry out and saw that he was trying to rescue a dove which had been seized by an eagle. The shepherd raised his sapphire rod, which even the birds of the air and the beasts of the field obeyed, and bade the the eagle release her prey. But the eagle, although she understood Moses perfectly, for in those days men and the lower creatures often talked together, would not obey him.

"If I do not carry this dove home to

my nest, my little ones will starve," said the eagle.

Moses promised that if the eagle would release the dove, he himself would provide food for her little ones. The eagle loosened her hold upon the trembling dove, which flew gladly away. Moses bared his own breast and tore from it a handful of flesh, which he gave to the waiting eagle that her little ones might be fed. The eagle flew away satisfied and Moses smiled in his pain, rejoicing that he had saved the persecuted dove.

"This man has a pitying heart and he will pity Israel," said God. "Nor does he fear pain and that is well; for he must bear great pain if he becomes the shepherd of his people."

He sent the rescued dove back to Moses and in its mouth the bird bore a few leaves, cool and moist with dew. These it laid upon Moses' torn breast; the pain stopped at once and the flesh ceased to bleed. But one tiny scar remained until

the day of the shepherd's death. On that day God resolved to call Moses to his destiny.

III

One day when Moses drew near Mount Horeb he wondered why passing birds did not alight upon it. Then he saw before him a wondrous bush which seemed to be on fire, yet was not consumed by the flames; not one of its blossoms was even singed although the fire was so hot that Moses grew faint and dizzy from the great heat.

It is said that God chose to appear as a heavenly flame shining through the branches of a thorn bush because that tree had never been polluted by being carved into heathen idols. Besides, the thorn bush is the symbol of Israel, the lowliest of plants representing the lowliest and most abused of nations. And some say that God chose the thorn bush to be His messenger to teach man modesty

and humility; for He descended from heaven to speak from this stunted tree when He might have spoken to His servant from the top of a stately cedar or even a lofty mountain.

Moses took five steps in the direction of the burning bush that he might view it closer. God saw that his face was grieved and worn as though he still mourned for the sorrows of his people suffering in Egypt. God spoke to Moses out of the thorn bush:

"Moses, leave your sheep and return to Egypt and tell Pharaoh to set Israel free, for I have appointed you to be the shepherd of My people."

IV

The Torah, which is the history of the children of Israel in those far off days, tells us how Moses became the shepherd of his people and led them out of Egypt toward the Promised Land. But before they were allowed to enter it, they were

obliged to wander in the wilderness for forty years. During that time the older people, who had been slaves so long in Egypt that they were no longer fit for freedom in a land of their own, died and were buried in the desert. The younger men and women grew up brave and strong and ready to begin their hard life in the country that God had promised them for their own.

Now that the journey was over at last, Moses who had grown old and weary in the service of his people longed to rest. But he hoped that he might be allowed to enter the Promised Land with the others; he prayed without ceasing that God would permit him to cross the Jordan with his brethren.

"Lord of the Universe," said Moses, "consider how long and faithfully I have toiled for my people, Israel. I have suffered all their sorrows, and in every case my affliction was greater than theirs because I was their leader. Now Thou art bring-

ing them into a land of peace and plenty, but Thou wilt end my days before I can behold their happiness. I pray that Thou grant me only to cross the Jordan and die in the Promised Land."

But the Lord answered kindly: "You know that I have sworn two vows; the one to destroy Israel for sinning against Me in its worship of the golden calf; the other that you should die before you entered the Promised Land. I recalled the oath to destroy Israel, because you pleaded with Me, saying, 'Forgive them!' If I have broken one pledge I must keep the other. If I let Israel live, I must keep My vow to bring death upon you before you cross the Jordan. But if you desire, I will destroy Israel as I have sworn to do and allow you to enter the Promised Land alive."

Moses was horrified and he cried: "May I and my children's children be destroyed forever, rather than that the nail of one son of Israel be bruised! Yet why wilt Thou let me die before my eyes look upon

the land of Israel? Alas! that my feet may not enter the land, that my hands may not pluck its fruits, that my palate may not taste the fruits of the land that flows with milk and honey!"

"Nay," said God, in pity for Moses' disappointment, "though you shall not enter the land, yet you shall see it before you." Then God took Moses by the hand and led him to the peak of one of the high places by the side of the Jordan river, that he might look over the Land of Promise which his people were to inherit for his sake.

His eyes were strengthened to four times their natural vision, and he looked over the fair land of Israel stretching before him just beyond the Jordan. He saw the mountains of Israel, lofty Hermon in its mantle of pearly snow and the lower hills crowned with oak, cedars, and carobs; he saw the fields smiling with corn and wheat, olive groves and vineyards, and beyond, far to the west, the tum-

bling silver of the Great Sea. The land was so pleasant that Moses wept anew at the thought of never entering it.

"Why wilt Thou let me die, oh God, now that I have at last led my people to this place?" cried Moses. "For who will be a shepherd to my sheep, and where will they stray without my guidance?"

Again God took pity upon Moses and He showed him another vision, this time of the future glory of the humble tribe of slaves he had led across the desert. God revealed to Moses all that would come to pass in the land of Israel, the redemption of the people from the hand of the Philistines in the days of David, the building of the temple under Solomon, the line of kings from the house of David, and the more glorious line of prophets beginning with Elijah. Moses looked long upon the temple; it glimmered with the radiance of pearls and diamonds; through the shining columns an even greater glory shone, the brightness of the Presence of

God, which is brighter than all jewels. Standing before the altar he could see his descendants offering sacrifice.

"God, I am content," said Moses, "if my people will continue to honor Thee! But Israel has sinned many times in the desert and who will be their leader and their teacher if I am destroyed?"

"Every generation has its own leader," answered God, "and when the generation dies, the leader must die also. You must follow the generation who died in the wilderness. Now a new generation has been reared to enter the Land of Promise and I have appointed Joshua to lead them there."

"If I die I make a place for Joshua," answered Moses with his usual humility. "Then it is right that I should become his servant."

Moses hurried to Joshua's tent and at the door he found his old pupil Joshua studying the Law. God caused Joshua's eyes to become suddenly dim so that he

did not perceive Moses standing there and did not rise to do him reverence. God knew that if Moses thought even his best-loved pupil no longer respected him, he would be more willing to die.

Soon the men of Israel all gathered before the tent for their daily lesson from the Torah; when they saw Joshua seated while Moses stood before him, they became very angry. "How dare you remain seated while Moses our teacher stands?" they cried to Joshua.

Joshua arose and perceived Moses for the first time. His face burned with shame; he tried to throw himself at Moses' feet to ask for forgiveness. "What have I done, O my master!" he cried.

But Moses raised him and said: "You did right to show me no reverence; I am no longer your master."

Then the men of Israel crowded about Moses and pleaded: "Moses, our teacher, teach us the Law."

"I am no longer your teacher," said Moses.

"But who will teach us if you are silent, for there is not another teacher like you in the whole world?" asked the people.

Then a voice thundered from heaven: "Joshua shall be your teacher: listen to his words." The people of Israel, wondering and reluctant, sat upon the ground before the tent of Joshua and waited for him to begin his instruction. Moses sat at his right hand; the children of Aaron, who were priests in Israel, at his left. Joshua scarcely knew how to begin; he was a young man and very humble and doubted his own worth.

Even at that moment the spirit of knowledge departed from Moses and entered his disciple Joshua. Now Joshua began to teach the Law to all the people and he was no longer uncertain and afraid. When he had finished speaking, the men of Israel, hungering for a word from their old teacher, begged Moses to continue the

lesson. But Moses could not even repeat what Joshua had said; he no longer understood the words of the Law he himself had brought down from Mount Sinai to Israel. Then Moses rose and covered his face with his cloak and prayed:

"Lord of the World! Until this moment I wished for life; but now I long to die."

So Moses, knowing that he was no longer needed to lead his people, prayed for death. Now he rejoiced when a voice spoke to him from heaven, saying: "The time has come for you to separate yourself from the world."

But Moses answered: "First let me bless my people Israel." He blessed the people of Israel, tribe by tribe, and at the last he said to all of them: "During all my days you were not pleased with me, my people, because I often spoke harshly to you and chastized you. I troubled you often in the wilderness, urging you to keep the Law.... but now—forgive!"

"We forgive you," answered the men

of Israel through their tears, "and we beg your forgiveness, for we were often unruly, troublesome sheep to a watchful shepherd. Often we refused to obey you after the Lord brought us out of Egypt. Will you also forgive?"

"You are forgiven," Moses said. He wept with the congregation of Israel, for he loved them.

Then Moses sanctified himself; he washed in clear water and put on fresh garments, and made himself ready for death. No man was permitted to see him die nor to know the place of his burial, for God feared that should the children of Israel know his last resting place they might follow the custom of the heathen nations about them and lay sacrifices upon his tomb. But that all men might know how Moses went to his death, God described to Moses how he should die. Moses wrote the tale of his death with tears and left it in a book for his people to read when he should be gone from them forever.

God brought Moses to the height of Mount Nebo and three angels descended to care for him. One spread out Moses' bier, the other laid his shroud about his head, the third covered his feet. The angels stood about his bier and waited.

Then Samael, the angel of death, descended upon the mountain top, his sword in his hand, ready to slay. But he could not take the soul of Moses and he fled back to God crying out in despair: "I cannot slay this man who has talked to Thee face to face and carried Thy words to man."

So God Himself appeared to Moses as he lay upon the mountain of Nebo waiting for his death.

It was dusk. In the valley below the children of Israel mourned for their lost leader, although their hearts already turned to Joshua who was to lead them out across the Jordan into their Promised Land. On the mountain top there was silence, sweet and pleasant to Moses after

his long wanderings in the desert. He had wandered so very far, along so many hard and thorny paths, since the day when he had bowed before the burning thorn bush and promised to become the shepherd of his people. Now at last he felt he had earned the right to lay down his crook, to rest undisturbed forever in the wilderness.

God spoke to Moses and for a moment the soul of Moses lingered, uncertain and afraid. "I have travelled so very far," said Moses, "that I should like to rest at last. Where must I go?"

God answered: "Come, and you will be with Me."

And the Lord kissed Moses and took his soul with the kiss.

THE CAVE WHERE DAVID SLEPT

IV

THE CAVE WHERE DAVID SLEPT

As far from the village of Bethlehem as a sturdy lad can walk in an hour there was once a cave. One entered it by bending low and crawling through the door. It was so covered with moss that it was difficult to find it among the rocks. If you look for it to-day you could not find it at all; it has disappeared from the sight of man along with the golden ornaments King Solomon placed in the temple at Jerusalem and the cloak Elijah dropped from heaven and the many-branched candelabrum, which the Roman soldiers carried away from the land of Israel long ago. But fathers in Palestine still tell their sons the story of King David's cave; and often the brown-skinned lads from Bethlehem, where the Shepherd King was born, cease

their play among the rocky hills to wonder whether they may be the fortunate youths to find the place where David still watches and waits, dreaming of his people Israel.

On a bright spring morning many centuries ago, the cave which has now vanished forever was the meeting place for a group of merry boys from Bethlehem. David was their leader, a boy with sunny hair and keen eyes; his foot was always the fleetest when they ran races; when they flung stones, his pebble was always found at the greatest distance. He could play the harp, too, and when he sang his voice was as sweet as a maid's; but he was strong far beyond his years, and the gossips at the well at Bethlehem told how on one day he had slain four lions and three bears with his naked hand.

The old men and the gossiping wives told also how once David when watching his father's sheep had stumbled upon a *rëem* asleep. The *reëm* was the largest of

all beasts and David, seeing but dimly in the twilight, mistook the shaggy brown monster for a great hill. He began to climb up its sides; the *reëm* rose in great fury and David found himself high in the air, higher than a mountain, as he hung elevated on the spreading horns of the beast.

As David hung exactly one hundred ells above the earth, in danger of death if he were thrown to the ground, he vowed that if God would rescue him he would one day build a temple to the Lord in Jerusalem, one hundred ells high. At that instant a lion appeared from among the rocks. The *reëm* like all other animals of the field fears and obeys the lion, the king of beasts. He lowered his head in homage and David slipped to the ground without injury.

But now he faced the hungry lion. He gave himself up for lost, when a deer ran past them and the lion turned and gave chase. David was saved from the most

curious death which had ever threatened a son of Bethlehem; no wonder the elders predicted that God had surely preserved him for great things, while the younger folks considered him a hero, and he ruled them like an uncrowned king.

On this bright morning David as usual led his friends in their games; they had been playing in the cave, half of the company pretending they were robbers, the other half, led by young David, acting as soldiers of the King and capturing them after a long battle. The boys had finished their game and were now resting among the rocks; the warm sun shone brightly; the birds sang sweetly among the green leaves; the little brook, where David's sheep had wandered off to drink, tinkled a merry song. The children of Bethlehem seemed to be in a world which was all happiness and contentment. But suddenly they heard the sound of weeping and a woman's voice raised in lamentation. Across the hills came a woman clad in

black garments which were covered with dust; her sandals were also gray with the dust of the road and torn by the rocks. Her white head was bowed as though in grief; she was weeping.

The other boys did not dare to approach her. But David's tenderness of heart overcame his timidity; he went to the weeping woman and spoke to her.

"Why do you grieve?" he asked. "Can I and my companions help you if you have lost your way or are in any distress?"

The woman shook her head. "No one but God can help me," she said. "And this day even He has turned a deaf ear to the cry of one who has been oppressed and persecuted."

The woman began to weep again. After David had brought her water from the brook to drink and given her some bread from his shepherd's scrip, she was able to tell the boys her story.

"I am a widow," she said. "All the years of my life I have toiled and saved

that I might not eat the bread of charity in my old age, since I have neither son nor daughter nor husband to provide for me. All that I saved I stored beneath the stones of my threshold, creeping out of my house to do so at night that no prying neighbor might discover where I hid my treasure. But no treasure house is safe unless God Himself turns the key!

"My one sister was ill and she sent for me in great haste. I left my house for the first time in many years that I might visit her. I did not have enough money to buy food and raiment for my journey nor a mule to ride. When the road before my house was deserted, I dug up my gold that lay beneath the stones of my threshold.

"Some women passed by on their way to the well, then some children, and later a man on his way to labor in the fields. I was in great haste to hide my treasure and depart for my sister's house; yet I dared not bury it again in plain sight of those passing down the road.

"Then a foolish plan came into my mind, but at that time it seemed a wise one. I had a neighbor, a widow like myself, who lived all alone. I had always found her honest; but I dared not trust her with my secret; for she always had a loose tongue and I feared that she would tell the world of my hidden wealth, if she once knew of my gold. I hastily poured all the gold into these two stone honey pots"—and she held up before David and the boys the two stone jars she carried—"closed them with a seal, and gave them into her keeping, telling her the jars contained honey. Then I went to visit my sister, whom I found so much recovered that in three days I was able to turn my face toward home.

"But, alas, when I came to my neighbor's house and demanded that she return my gold to me, she only laughed. 'Have you grown mad from the heat and fatigue of the road?' she asked. 'You never gave me gold, but only two jars of honey

to keep for you while you were away. Here are the jars just as you gave them to me, with the honey undisturbed.'

"I tore open the seal, which had been broken and then mended, but the jars were empty. I fell upon my knees before my neighbor and begged her to be merciful and to return my little wealth to me, but she only laughed. I threatened to bring her before the elders, who sit at the gate, for judgment; again she laughed and told me that if I did they would call me a mad woman, since no one had seen her take the jars and only God had been my witness.

"Still I went to the elders before the gate and told them my story. It was as my false neighbor had said. Since there were no witnesses, the elders declared that her word that she had received nought but two sealed jars of honey was to be believed instead of my oath that the jars had been filled with gold. But they advised me to journey to the court of King Saul and lay my case before him.

"I sold my mule and again bought food and raiment for my journey. I travelled to the court of King Saul, who received me kindly, but repeated only the word of the judges at the gate: there had been no witnesses, there was no proof that I had given my neighbor two jars of gold and not two jars of honey. So now I am returning home, penniless after a life of toil, facing an old age of want and despair."

"Do you not forget," asked one of the lads, "that the laws of Moses, our master, teach us to care for the widowed and the orphan and the needy? As long as you live no man in all Israel will let you come to want."

But David interrupted him impatiently. "This woman will have justice before God and man," he cried. "In her old age she will depend upon the gold won by the toil of her own hands and not the bounties of her neighbors. Give me the honey jars," he said to the weeping woman.

"They are empty," she answered, but she gave him the jars.

David broke the first jar and it was indeed empty. Then he broke the second against a rock and a cry of joy broke from the woman's lips as she saw that God had sent her a witness in her need. For the wicked neighbor had neglected to wash the second jar thoroughly; the inside had remained sticky and several pieces of gold still adhered to the bottom of the pot.

"Take this jar to King Saul," commanded young David, "and ask him whether this is indeed proof that you have spoken truly and that when you gave your wicked neighbor the jars they were filled with your gold. If you desire it, I will go with you and see that you receive justice."

The widow begged David to accompany her to court and so well did he plead her cause before King Saul, who was also convinced by the mute testimony of the broken jar, that the king ordered the

wicked neighbor to return the gold on pain of being thrown into prison for the rest of her life. The widow went home rejoicing and David went with her. But soon he was to return to court, for Saul like all others who looked upon David was charmed with his beauty and grace. Soon afterwards, so the records of that day tell us, when Saul was sick and discouraged, he desired a harp player and a sweet-voiced musician to play and sing before him and drive away his heaviness of heart. He remembered the bright-haired shepherd boy who had come to his court to plead for the unhappy widow.

Saul sent for David and the people of the court rejoiced when his music drove away the madness of the King. Saul himself grew to love the boy like his own son; he might have loved him less had he known that Samuel, the judge over Israel, had chosen David from among all his brothers and had anointed his head with oil, saying, "Some day you will leave your

sheep and become a shepherd of Israel." But David grew weary of the court and he often dreamed of the cool, green fields about Bethlehem; the little brook where he had watered his father's sheep; and the cave, almost hidden with moss, where he and his young friends had often played together.

II

The scribes of long ago have written how David slew the giant Goliath and was rewarded for that deed by Saul; they tell also of Saul's jealousy and the madness which came upon him and caused him to seek David's life. Later sages tell us also how David was saved to sit upon the throne of Israel, not through armies of horsemen but by the aid of two humble creatures which he had formerly despised.

As a boy, watching his father's sheep in the fields near Bethlehem, David had often been annoyed by the wasps and spiders, which are especially troublesome in a warm

country like Palestine. One day he sat upon a rock in the shadow of the cave where he and his boy friends often played. But to-day he was alone; he was grateful for the solitude, for he was playing upon his harp, and whenever David played his harp and sang hymns of praise to God he forgot the entire world.

This harp which David had found hidden in the cave near Bethlehem was unlike any harp ever fashioned from the beginning of the world until this day. Its strings were made of the entrails of the ram which Abraham had sacrificed upon Mount Moriah instead of his beloved son Isaac: none but David were able to play upon it, for even under the hands of the most skilful musicians the strings remained dumb. But when David, wishing to praise God in the night season as well as by day, hung the instrument in his bedroom window, the wind passing over the strings played a melody never heard before beyond the borders of paradise. So David

would fall asleep to the strange sound of celestial music; when he awoke the divine melody would remind him to arise and thank God for His goodness to the sons of men.

Now as David played his harp this summer day, the heat of the noonday sun, the murmur of the little brook, the soft twitter of the birds drowsy with the heat, caused him to feel so sleepy that he began to nod to the sound of his own music. He was drifting away into that pleasant state which lies just between sleeping and waking, when a wasp alighted upon his hand and bit him severely.

David, crying out in pain, dropped his harp and tried to crush the troublesome insect, which had flown quickly away. David was very angry. "Lord of the Universe," he cried reproachfully to God, "why didst Thou ever create these hateful creatures? If I only had the power, I would destroy every wasp that passes through the air!"

As he sat grumbling, he saw a small brown spider crawling across the rocks. "What use has a spider?" thought David. "It can only spin a web, which has no value at all in the world. I wonder why the Creator ever allowed such useless creatures to be born." He raised his hand, about to crush the tiny creature, but something made him falter. Afterwards David was very glad that he had not slain either the troublesome wasp or the useless spider.

For when he was a fugitive from the wrath of King Saul, he once surprised the king and his soldiers fast asleep in their camp. David might have slain the king as he slept, but he would not slay the man God had chosen to be ruler over Israel. Yet he did not wish to quit the place without leaving some proof of generosity to Saul. So David risked his life and foolishly lingered long enough to snatch up the king's water cruse and cut a piece from his garment. "When he awakes,"

thought David, "he will know that I have been here but did not seek to injure him."

David turned to leave the place: but Abner, who slept at the king's feet, turned suddenly in his sleep and threw his legs over David's two feet, holding him there as a prisoner. David did not know what to do: if he tried to draw away he might awaken Abner who would alarm the camp; if he remained there until dawn, someone would awaken and give the alarm and he would surely be put to death.

As he stood trembling with terror, a wasp flew past his cheek. David mechanically raised his hand to dash it aside, but the insect had already alighted on Abner's knee. Fortunately for David, Abner did not awaken; he merely grunted in his sleep as he felt the insect's sting, and rolled over on the ground. Quick as a flash David pulled his feet away and took to flight. It was not until the next day that he realized how his life had been saved by a despised creature of the air.

The years passed and David was still a fugitive. David had sought shelter in the cave in Ziph; as he lay crouched in the darkness his thoughts wandered back to the cave near Bethlehem where he played as a boy. He wondered whether he would ever go back to Bethlehem again; his heart was sick for his old home and the peace he had known when as a boy he watched his father's sheep. As he lay in the cave in Ziph weeping, a spider swung itself across the door and began to spin its web.

The inhabitants of Ziph desired to win Saul's friendship; they had sent messengers to Saul telling him that David whom he hoped to slay lay hidden in a cave in their midst. Saul rejoiced greatly that his enemy would soon be delivered into his hands; he called Abner and his mightiest men to him and they set out to find David that they might slay him.

Crouched in the damp darkness, David heard the sound of many voices. He

almost fainted with terror as he recognized the voice of Abner, the king's trusted captain: "Perhaps David lies in this cave. Let us enter and see."

Saul approached the cave and was about to enter. Suddenly he stopped and David wondered when he heard the king laugh loudly as he turned toward his followers.

"David is not hiding in this place!" said Saul. "See the spider's web that hangs clear across the mouth of the cave. It is a true witness that no human being is within; had anyone entered it, he would have torn the threads of the web in passage. Let us make haste and seek further, lest he be hiding in some other cave nearby and escape us while we linger here."

Long after Saul and his men had passed out of hearing among the rocks, David lay in the cave, waiting for darkness to cover his escape. He thanked God for this new sign of His mercy in sparing his life; he thanked Him also for creating the despised

spider which had saved him. When at last David left his hiding place he crawled out of the cave with his face close to the ground, for he thought it would be poor payment to the helpful spider if he walked upright and tore the web in passing.

III

After many years when Saul was slain by those old enemies of Israel, the Philistines, David was made king in Jerusalem and ruled the people in his stead. Never was there such a king over Israel; long after his death the people never tired of reciting his deeds and the glories of his reign. Sitting about their wood-fire in the wet days of the winter season, the old men delighted in telling stories of the shepherd king, and the young lads rejoiced in listening.

The boys and girls about Jerusalem and those who dwelt within the walls of the city of David loved no tale better than the story of King David's tomb. For a legend

had grown up about the place where the best-loved King of Israel was said to be buried, though who can be sure of his resting place after these many changing years?

When David died in Jerusalem, a very aged king, crowned with years and honors and the love of all his subjects (for there was never a king like David in all the world from the beginning of time until this very age!) when he died, says the story, his son Solomon laid him to rest in the most magnificent tomb the eyes of man have ever seen. It was not so large as the famed pyramids where the Pharaohs of Egypt slept their last sleep, but it was far more beautiful. The walls were built of many colored marble cunningly pieced together to form an intricate pattern; on the inner walls were pictured the crook which had been David's as a boy and the tower he afterwards built in Jerusalem, which still bears his name. The casket which contained the body of

the warrior king was placed upon a bier of pure gold set with gems; over it all hung a canopy of woven cloth of gold from which four heavy ropes of gold reached nearly to the ground, each ending in a tassel encrusted with emeralds and rubies. In such splendor lay David, King of Israel, who had once been a simple shepherd boy, running barefoot along the hills about Bethlehem.

At the command of Solomon, skilful masons sunk the bier of gold deep into the earth and covered it with a slab of marble. Here the later kings of Israel, beginning with mighty Solomon, were buried; but no man might look upon the resting place of David, which lay below. More than once men robbed the tomb of the treasures that Solomon had buried with his father, as when Hyrcanus, the high priest, drew forth a thousand talents during the assault of Antiochus the Syrian upon Jerusalem; again when Herod the wicked king robbed the place of great sums of money, for he

respected neither the living nor the dead. But no man could ever penetrate to the place where David slept and no man ever looked upon the face of the dead king after the masons of King Solomon had sealed his secret tomb.

A long time after the Jewish kings had ceased to reign in Jerusalem, a certain Mohammedan ruler who dwelt in Jerusalem happened to pass the ancient tomb. This pasha had often heard the stories which the simple Jewish folk of Jerusalem loved to tell round their evening fires during the wet season; how David, the good king, had never died but still lived to help his people in their greatest need. He had heard that no man might descend to the subterranean vault where David slept, for he would pay for his boldness with his life.

Thinking of these old tales he leaned forward to look through one of the tiny windows which had been cut by Herod's order in the walls of the tomb. In some

manner his scimitar loosened from his belt and fell through this little window into the darkness of the cavern below. The pitchy blackness seemed to devour the weapon, glittering with pearls and diamonds, as a hungry snake swallows a bird with shining feathers; in a moment it had disappeared.

The pasha called a slave to his side and in spite of the poor fellow's protest, for he had also heard strange stories of the tomb, caused him to be bound with a rope and lowered into the darkness. A moment later a terrible shriek came up to the pasha and his retinue; when they drew up the slave, he was dead and his face was drawn with terror.

Three other slaves, one after another, were bound in quick succession and just as quickly drawn dead from the tomb. After that even the pasha's hard heart felt a little pity; he promised that he would not send any more of his servants into that dreadful place. But what was to

be done, as he had determined neither to eat nor to sleep until his sword again hung at his side?

Then his old teacher, who had followed in his train, a man of over a hundred winters, spoke to the angry ruler and said:

"Oh my lord, why send innocent men to a strange and terrible doom? There are in this wicked city many men whose evil deeds have long earned them the severest punishment; some of them already lie in prison sentenced to the stake or to die by the hand of the headsman. Why not send such a criminal into the mysterious tomb since he already merits a horrible death?"

This advice seemed good to the pasha; he immediately summoned a judge to come before him. His servants at his command fetched a cadi who had been holding court beneath a tree not far from the tomb. He was a fat man and came so hurriedly to bow before the pasha that at first he was all out of breath and could not say a word, but stood there bowing his

forehead to the earth in the politest manner possible.

"Have done with your courtesy!" snapped the pasha, for he was very hungry as well as cross over the loss of his favorite sword. "Cease your bowing and answer me: how many criminals have you condemned to-day?'

"Ah, my lord," answered the cadi, rubbing his hands with glee and smiling all over his broad, flat face, "since you have come to the throne all vice and violence seem to have taken wings. Only three criminals have been brought before me for the last two weeks and they are only poor simple wretches who had quarrelled with a Jew in a neighboring shop and beaten him for his impudence. I told them they must treat all men gently, even unbelieving dogs who know not our prophet, and sent them away with my pardon.

"This is sad, very sad," said the pasha, "for I have counted on at least a dozen

condemned criminals to send into the depths of the earth after my treasured sword. What am I to do now to recover it?"

Now the cadi was a Jew who had gone over to Mohammedanism; he not only despised the faith of his fathers but hated all Jews with a cruel hatred. His little eyes glittered evilly in his fat face as he bowed again before the pasha and offered his advice.

"Oh my gracious Lord," he panted, "has it not occurred to you that there is witchcraft and treason in all this? I verily believe that these Jews who hate you as they hate all that is gracious and beneficent, did summon by their evil incantations the spirits who snatched away your scimitar. Why not send for the Rabbi of Jerusalem to demand that they restore it to you by the same magic which took it away?"

This advice seemed good to the pasha, who at once ordered the Rabbi of Jerusa-

lem to be brought before him. The venerable old man was overcome with astonishment and fear when the pasha accused the Jews of conspiring against him, and demanded that they at once discover means of restoring his treasured sword.

"Alas, my lord," he cried, flinging himself upon the ground before the pasha and seeking to kiss his robes, "my poor people know no magic; they are the least powerful of all the sons of men. We did not cause you to lose your sword nor can we restore it to you."

By this time the pasha, whose dinner hour was long since over, had a very disagreeable headache. This did not improve his temper; spurning the prostrate man with his foot, he cried fiercely:

"Unless in three days my scimitar hangs at my side, I will put every Jew in Jerusalem to death by torture. At the hour of noon, three days from to-day, I shall return here for my sword. Unless

either you or someone you appoint hands me my sword, I will order my guards to slay every Jewish soul in Jerusalem."

Then the pasha went to his dinner, and the Rabbi, weeping and wringing his hands, hurried to the synagogue. He ordered the beadle, a simple, child-like old man, to summon at once every Jewish soul in Jerusalem. The Rabbi's face was so changed with terror and his words were so wild that the old beadle knew some dreadful thing had happened. He ran wildly from house to house in the Jewish quarter, begging everyone not to lose a moment, hinting that if they did not hurry to seek shelter in the synagogue, they might not be alive at sundown. Long before dusk the synagogue was crowded to its very doors; its walls resounded with the wailings and the sobbings of the Jews, who already felt themselves marked for death.

But the Rabbi sought to comfort them. "There is still hope for us," he said, "for

the God of Israel has never deserted His people. Once He rescued our ancestor David out of the hands of the Philistines; He is still strong enough to deliver us from the power of the pasha. Go home, my people, and for three days and three nights do not allow either food or drink to pass your lips. Put on sackcloth and ashes and pray to God for forgiveness, for surely it is for some great sin that He now allows the pasha to torment us. Perhaps if we fast and pray," said the Rabbi, "God will hear our prayers and lead us into deliverance."

The Jews gladly obeyed the Rabbi; for three days and three nights they fasted and prayed for help. But when the appointed time had expired, they found that God had sent them no messenger to tell them how they might be saved from the pasha's wrath. Instead, when they reached their synagogue, they found a dozen of the pasha's guards waiting for them, with orders to seize the Rabbi and

five other leading elders from among the people and carry them to their deaths, after which the pasha had ordained a massacre of the entire community.

The Rabbi besought the pasha's guards to be patient. "Grant us a single hour," he pleaded, "and we will find a way to avert the pasha's wrath." He bribed the soldiers to remain outside the synagogue while he returned to the frightened Jews; they greeted him with lamentations, for they felt that they already looked upon death.

"Friends," said the Rabbi, "our time is short upon earth unless we can devise a plan to pacify the pasha. Unless one of us can place his lost sword within his hand, we will all be slain. You have all heard how no man who has entered the tomb to find the pasha's scimitar has returned alive; but remember that these men were not Jews but unbelieving Mohammedans. Perhaps if a Jew should enter the tomb he would meet with no harm."

There was a long silence. At last one of the elders spoke. "Oh master," he said, bowing low to the Rabbi, "you are not only one of our wisest and most reverenced Jews, but the leader of our Jewish community. Surely, if you enter the tomb no harm will come to you."

The Rabbi shook his head. "Alas," he said, "what is my wisdom and what is my piety worth before God? I am a sinful man like all of you; should I enter the tomb I might be struck down as soon as my foot touched the threshold. Let someone save his people who is more worthy of the honor than I am!"

"Who is that man? Who will enter the tomb and secure the lost sword for the pasha?" cried many voices.

"Let us draw lots," suggested the old beadle humbly, for he was always afraid of being laughed at whenever he suggested anything. "Let the man who draws the marked lot enter the tomb and seek for the pasha's sword."

Since nobody could suggest any better plan, the beadle prepared a number of lots, one for every man in the community, and each in turn drew his slip of paper. When it was discovered that the beadle had drawn the marked lot, everyone joined him in his lamentations. They felt that there might have been some hope of rescue if a man of quick wits and book learning went into the tomb and braved its unknown dangers. But the poor beadle would surely become confused and do just the wrong thing. Yet, since no one volunteered to take his place, he was allowed to appear with the Rabbi and the other elders before the pasha, and to offer to enter the place where David lay buried.

The pasha, interested to see whether a Jew would suffer the same fate as a Mohammedan if he ventured into the tomb, gave orders that the beadle should immediately be lowered into the darkness. The beadle suddenly grew calm, since he

felt that it was just as simple to die as the slaves had died instead of waiting to be slaughtered with the other Jews; he allowed himself to be bound with a long robe and bade the pasha's servants lift him through the stone window, for he was a fat man and very awkward. A moment later he disappeared in the darkness as the Mohammedan slaves had done; but this time there was no shriek or call for help.

The minutes dragged slowly; the Rabbi and the elders who waited under guard felt sure that the unfortunate beadle had met his fate and gave themselves up for lost. Suddenly the slave who held one end of the rope insisted that he felt someone tugging upon it. At the pasha's order, four stout men pulled together; at last they drew through the window the old beadle, perspiring and panting but unhurt, with the shining jewelled scimitar in his hand.

"Truly," said the pasha, "you are under the protection of God." He gave the

beadle a bag of gold and a rich chain from his own neck and sent him back to the synagogue with a guard of honor. For once in their lives the Rabbi and the other elders had to follow their once despised sexton very meekly. He was received by the rescued Jews with great acclaim and a banquet was immediately prepared in his honor. But this was unfortunate, for the beadle's enormous appetite had been whetted by his three days' fasting and he overate so recklessly at this dinner that he had to be carried home from the feast unconscious.

The pasha sent his own physician to attend him, for he had ordered the beadle to appear before him in his palace the next day to relate at his leisure what had occurred as he searched for the scimitar in the darkness of the tomb. The Jews, also, were very curious to learn of his adventures; but since the pasha had ordered him to tell no man of his stay in the tomb before he had recited his tale in court, the

beadle's lips had been obediently sealed. Besides, he had been too busy eating to answer questions at the banquet.

Much to the pasha's anger, for he was an inquisitive man, the beadle died without recovering consciousness. From that day to this no one has ever guessed what befell him in David's supposed resting place or who placed the missing sword in his hand. This tale no man can know, but there is another tale the peasants of Palestine love to tell over their woodfires during the rainy season, which few dare to deny, although the shepherds who first told it have been dead these many years.

About a hundred years or more ago, two shepherd lads of Bethlehem wandered far off into the distant hills in search of a lamb that had strayed from their fold. Suddenly they came to a cave, which they did not remember ever having seen in that place before, although both knew the country for miles around as well as a man knows every feature of his mother's

face. The cave was almost hidden with moss, damp and greenish black; but, and this seemed very strange to the two shepherds, through the very low door a great light seemed to shine as though someone had lit a light within its depths.

They hesitated for a little while; but they were both brave lads, and so at last they made up their minds to enter the cave. Throwing off their cloaks that they might run unhampered, and clutching their staves tightly lest they be attacked, they crawled through the small opening.

The cave was filled with light, a light so intense that for a moment they were blinded and could only stand there with their eyes covered with their arms, groping and afraid. But at length when they had grown a little accustomed to the glare, they managed to look about them.

The place was empty save for a chair, very large and stately, and a table beside it, both hewn out of the natural rock. On this rude throne sat a man they knew

must be King David, even before they looked upon the golden crown he wore, the shining crown which drove away the darkness and filled the cave with its splendor. He sat there, very still and stately, his head erect, his hands resting idly in the lap of his royal crimson robe beaded with pearls, his eyes looking far away. But at last he seemed to hear the troubled breathing of the two awed shepherds and he turned to them and smiled.

"Shepherds!" he said, "You carry the shepherd's staff and scrip just as I did when I was a little lad in Bethlehem!" He held out one hand to the boys and his eyes were so kind that they ventured to approach him. "Come nearer, for I would smell the breath of the open fields that is upon you and the smell of your sheep. It is a long time since I have watched my flocks upon the hillside or gathered meadow flowers." He smiled a little. "They searched for treasures in my tomb at Jerusalem, but how could I rest there,

far from my home and wait in exile through all the weary years! No, I must sleep here, near Bethlehem, lulled by the whisper of the trees and the sound of the quiet waters, until the day comes when I may go forth in my strength and again shepherd my people Israel."

He was silent a little while, his hands playing with the tassels of his girdle, heavy with pearls. "Some day I will go forth and lead my scattered sheep back to Jerusalem," he promised. "Even in this quiet place I hear them calling me. When they cry loudly enough I will come." He broke off a great handful from the pearls which adorned his girdle ends and held them out to the shepherds. "Open your scrips," he commanded, "and fill them with precious pearls that you may show them to all men who question you and prove that you have not dreamed a dream."

The boys eagerly opened their leather pouches; David filled them to overflowing

with the pearls, one of which would have been enough to keep a man in comfort till his old age, with a fine fortune for his heirs after his death. Then he leaned back in his chair and sighed as though from weariness. "Let me rest now," he told them, "for I would sleep again another hundred years or so in the cave where I used to play as a boy."

The shepherds groped their way to the low door, for suddenly the cave grew very dark. Out in the sunlight again, they put on their cloaks and spread their pearls out upon a flat stone, rejoicing not only at their sudden wealth, but at the proof they could carry to all men that they had actually seen King David and the cave where he lay asleep.

But the pearls had changed to tiny pebbles, and when they turned to look for the cave, it had disappeared.

THE KING WHO BECAME A BEGGAR

V

THE KING WHO BECAME A BEGGAR

There was never another king like King Solomon, the son of David, in the whole history of the world. He was not only wiser in book lore than the wisest sages of Palestine and all the countries of the East, but he knew the names of every plant and every bird and every creeping thing beneath the sun. He also knew the language of the birds and beasts and insects; and, although he was as gentle as the doves with whom he exchanged compliments every morning, he was also as crafty as the serpents, who had never been able to deceive him.

What other king in the whole world would have been crafty enough to put Pharaoh to shame for his trickery? When

Solomon needed help in building the Temple at Jerusalem and wrote to Pharaoh asking him for aid, Pharaoh thought to deceive him. Pharaoh sent Solomon a scroll on which were written many fair promises; he sent with the same messenger seventy men whom he described in his message as the most skilful artists in his entire kingdom. Solomon was overjoyed and filled with gratitude; he prepared at once to send back the messenger loaded with gifts. But first he conferred with the two owls who called upon him every evening exactly at ten o'clock and instructed him concerning matters of state.

"Why has Pharaoh grown so suddenly kind and generous?" asked Solomon, who was far too wise to believe that the Egyptians ever did any courtesy to any foreigner without hope of reward.

The female owl clucked to herself in amusement, for she knew of Pharaoh's trickery; but, being a well-trained wife, she allowed her husband to answer.

"O King," said the male owl, ruffling up his feathers and looking very important, "it is well that you have consulted with us before obeying the impulses of your generous heart. Pharaoh writes truly that he has sent you his most skilful artists and artisans to beautify your Temple. But before he selected them he bade his astrologers choose all of his builders who would die within the year. The astrologers found by the stars that seventy men among Pharaoh's workers would surely die before another twelve months have passed. These men, O king, are the artists Pharaoh has sent to help you build and adorn your Temple."

Solomon was greatly shocked at Pharaoh's treachery, but he was far too clever to show the Egyptian that he was angry, lest he provoke him into warfare. So the next day he called the death-doomed artists before him; he gave each of them a garment concealed in a bag of fine linen,

bearing upon it the seal of the tribe of Judah.

"Return to your master, Pharaoh of Egypt," Solomon commanded the artists, "and before you enter his royal presence garb yourselves in the garments you will find in these bags. Then bow low before Pharaoh, but say no word while he reads the message I shall send him."

Then Solomon called a scribe to his side and bade him write two lines upon a bit of parchment. This he gave to Pharaoh's messenger, but no other presents, and the man returned with the artists to Egypt, each carrying his bundle wrapped in linen under his arm.

When they were admitted into Pharaoh's presence, he was amazed to see that every man was garbed from his neck to his ankles in the coarse white garments such as the Jews as well as the Egyptians were accustomed to wrap about their dead. The artists solemnly prostrated themselves before the throne, while the

messenger placed in Pharaoh's hand the parchment he had received from Solomon.

"To Pharaoh of Egypt," ran the scroll, "I fear you had no shrouds for these unfortunate men. Therefore I send your artists back to you, garbed in the death-clothes they will soon need so badly."

But it was not only Pharaoh whom Solomon astonished with his fore-knowledge and wit. Later he encountered the shrewdest of women, Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, who sought to puzzle him with her riddles and was sorely confounded by his answers.

Her manner of coming to Solomon was due to his knowledge of the language of the birds of the air and his power over them. So great was this power that often on an evening when he sat at wine in his great banquet hall, feasting with neighboring kings, he was able to summon even the wildest of birds, never tamed by the hand of man, and bid them sing and dance for the pleasure of the company.

One evening the hoopoe was missing among all the other feathered subjects Solomon had called together to entertain his guests. Solomon was very angry and at once sent his two faithful owls to arrest the truant. But first he had to step out upon the terrace of the palace to speak to them, since neither of the birds dared brave the blinding lights of the thousand torches which illuminated the banquet hall.

When the frightened hoopoe was finally brought before Solomon, its feathers were wet with the evening dews and ruffled; it thrust its head under its wing for shame. Solomon was about to hand the culprit over to two stout ravens with the order that they thrash it severely, when the little bird found courage to hop upon the table and address its king.

"O my lord," said the hoopoe, "before you have me punished, I pray you listen to my story, for it is the strangest tale your ears have ever heard. Three months

ago I resolved neither to eat food nor drink water until I had flown over the whole world to see for myself whether there was a single domain which is not subject to my lord the king."

The hoopoe paused for breath and Solomon stroked his beard with his long, jewelled hand, well pleased since he liked to have the birds flatter him.

"At last I found the city of Kitor in the East," went on the hoopoe. "Dust is more valuable than gold there, and silver is like the mud of the streets. Its trees have flourished from the beginning of the world, since they suck up water that flows from the Garden of Eden. The city is crowded with men who wear upon their heads sweet-smelling garlands of flowers plucked in Paradise. These men do not know how to wage war nor how to shoot with a bow and arrow, so it is but natural that a woman should rule over them. She is the Queen of Sheba and her beauty exceeds the beauty of all the king's wives as the

wisdom of Solomon exceeds the wisdom of all earthly kings."

After this the king was very anxious to see the Queen of Sheba. He at once sent for his scribes and they penned a letter, which Solomon fastened upon the hoopoe's wing with his own hands. The bird flew straight out of the palace window toward the rising sun, straight to the city of Kitor in the land of Sheba; all the other birds that nested in the royal gardens flew after him. Never before had a king's courier had such a fair retinue.

When they reached the city of Kitor it was past the eighth hour in the morning; the Queen of Sheba had gone out to the shrine in her garden, made out of pinkish marble and wreathed in flowers, to worship the sun. The cloud of birds which had followed Solomon's messenger flew across the face of the sun and suddenly blotted out his light. The queen looked up in horror, and, fearing that the darkness might portend the end of the world,

rent her garments and cried out to her gods. Then the hoopoe alighted near her and pecked at her sandal. She saw the letter tied to the hoopoe's wing with a narrow gold ribbon and at last found courage to untie the bit of parchment, which read:

"King Solomon wishes peace upon you, the Queen of Sheba, and upon the nobles of your realm. Know that God has appointed me king over the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, the demons and the spirits and the specters that pursue men by night. All the kings of the West and East have come to bring me greetings. If you will come and salute me, I will show you great honor, greater honor than to any of the kings who have come to visit me. But if you will not pay homage to me, I will send out kings, legions and riders against you. Do you ask who are these kings, legions and riders of King Solomon? The beasts of the field are my kings, the birds my riders, the

demons, spirits and shades of the night, my legions. If you do not obey me, the demons will throttle you and your subjects in your beds at night, the beasts will slay you in the fields, and the birds will consume your flesh."

The Queen of Sheba was greatly terrified at this message; she almost swooned from fright and would have fainted entirely if the hoopoe and the other birds which attended him had not brought water from the fountain in their beaks and dropped it upon her forehead to revive her. When she had recovered a little from her fright, she again tore her garments in token of mourning, and summoned before her all her elders and princes that they might consider Solomon's message and whether the queen should obey him and risk the long journey to the unknown land of Judah.

"Who is this King Solomon?" she asked her elders and her princes.

"We know nothing of King Solomon,"

they answered her, "and we know nothing of the kingdom he governs. Therefore why should we fear him?"

Their answer reassured the frightened queen and she decided not to obey the distant monarch. But the hoopoe was a wily creature and was determined to win her consent to visit his royal master. Every day when she went to pray to the sun in her garden, the bird flew down upon her shoulder and told her tales of King Solomon, of his wealth and his power and his wisdom. The queen grew so curious to see the wisest of kings that she consented to make the long journey to Jerusalem.

II

Before the Queen of Sheba (the land which is now called Arabia) went to visit King Solomon, she assembled her hundred ships which were upon the sea and loaded them with the finest kinds of wood and bright-feathered peacocks and trained

apes. Together with these she sent to Solomon, to be his servants, a thousand youths and maidens, born in the same year, in the same month, on the same day, in the same hour, all of equal stature and size, all clothed in purple garments. She sent also her most trusted steward, who bore a letter to King Solomon, saying, "I will hasten and be in Jerusalem at the end of three years. Till that day receive these poor gifts from the hand of your humble servant."

During the next three years the queen (whom men called Balkis) shut herself from her court and with her sages pondered on the riddles with which she planned to test the wisdom of Solomon. For she had grown jealous of his name for wisdom and determined to conquer him by asking him some riddle he could not solve. She forsook the pleasure of the dance and the banquet; she dismissed her musicians and sometimes was so absorbed in the ancient books of her people that she forgot to go

out to her pinkish marble shrine in the garden to pray. But she always found time to brush her long golden hair, which she would allow no handmaiden to touch lest it become snarled, and paint her eyes and stain her little nails the color of seashells. For she thought by her beauty to confuse Solomon even more than by her wit.

The three years passed and the Queen of Sheba, surrounded by a guard of three hundred youths, each the first-born son of a mighty noble of the land, set out to visit Solomon. Each man bore a casket of carved ivory filled to the very brim with pearls and other precious stones; each was arrayed in garments of purple and gold. But no man could tell what Balkis herself wore, for she shone like the sun in her splendor; her beauty was so overpowering that those who looked upon her were at once obliged to turn their dazzled eyes away.

When the time of her arrival drew nigh, King Solomon sent his favorite general

Benaiah to greet her. Benaiah was the handsomest man of the court and carried himself like a prince. As soon as Queen Balkis caught sight of him at the head of his shining retinue, she descended from her chariot and went forward to meet him on foot.

Greatly astonished, Benaiah also sprang to the ground; but when she was about to bow down before him he restrained her. "Why should you do me honor?" he cried.

"Are you not King Solomon?" asked the queen, who had never before looked upon a man of such royal carriage.

"I am only one of the servants of King Solomon," answered Benaiah, greatly amused at her blunder and not a little flattered to be mistaken for the king.

"Ah," said the queen to her guard, "if we have not looked upon the lion, we have at least looked upon his lair. If his servants possess such grace and beauty, how glorious shall we find the king himself when we look upon his face!"

In the space of an hour they reached the throne room of King Solomon's palace. The royal games, which took place every month, had just been completed and those who filled the throne room still wore the garments which they had donned for the Hippodrome. Solomon and his attendants, the scholars and their disciples, the priests and the Levites, who served in the Temple, wore blue robes, the color of the autumn sky; all the rest of the citizens of Jerusalem wore robes white as the snow in winter; visitors from the surrounding towns and villages wore suits of scarlet, the color of ripe summer fruits; while the heathen who came from afar, bringing rich gifts to win favor from the king, were garbed in green, the color of the ocean in the spring time, the season favorable for voyages.

High above the people King Solomon sat upon his throne, so marvellous a structure that all who saw it for the first time, whether Jew or heathen, fell down on their faces and praised God. This

throne was covered with fine gold from Ophir, studded with beryls, inlaid with marble, and jewelled with emeralds and rubies and pearls and all manner of gems. On each of its six steps were fashioned two golden lions and two golden eagles, a lion and an eagle to the left, and a lion and an eagle to the right; the pairs standing face to face, so that the right paw of the lion was opposite to the left wing of the eagle, and his left paw opposite to the right wing of the eagle. At the top of the sixth step was a platform covered with Solomon's magic carpet which could transport him to the farthest limits of the earth in the twinkling of an eye.

From this platform six more steps led to the royal seat. On the first of these steps crouched the statue of an ox and opposite to him a lion; on the second a wolf and a lamb; on the third a leopard and a goat; on the fourth was perched an eagle and a peacock; on the fifth a falcon and a cock; and on the sixth a hawk and

a sparrow; all made of gold. At the very top rested a dove, the symbol of Israel, her claws set in a hawk, to remind the people of the time when all the heathen nations of the world would be conquered by Israel and accept his God. Over the royal chair hung a golden candelabrum with golden lamps, pomegranates, snuff dishes, censers, chains and lilies. Seven branches extended from each side; on the arms to the right were the images of the seven patriarchs, the fathers of Israel: Adam, Noah, Shem, Job, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; on the arms to the left the images of the seven pious men of the world, Kohath, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad, Medad and the prophet Hur. Attached to the top of this chandelier was a golden bowl filled with the purest olive oil, to be used for the candelabrum in the Temple, and below, a golden basin also filled with olive oil for the chandelier above the throne.

But this did not end the many glories of

the throne of Solomon, since the demons who served him with fear and trembling had endowed it with magical properties. When Solomon seated himself upon his royal dais, a golden dove flew down from a pillar and took the sacred scroll out of its casket, which she presented to the king that Solomon might obey the commandment to have the Law with him and read in it all the days of his life. Most impressive of all, when Solomon held court and witnesses appeared before him, all the animals upon the throne became endowed with life; the ox lowed, the lion roared, the wolf howled, the lamb bleated, the leopard growled, the goat cried, the falcon screamed, the peacock gobbled, the cock crowed, the hawk screeched, the sparrow chirped. All of those weird noises so frightened the witnesses that none dared to give false testimony.

High on his throne in his chair of gold and ivory sat King Solomon; when the Queen of Sheba beheld his face, she was so

overcome by his beauty and the majesty of his countenance that she prostrated herself upon the ground before him and her slaves did likewise. Then she bade her servants place before Solomon the gifts she had brought him from Sheba, which they did with much ceremony.

"Now that you have seen the splendors of my court," Solomon said, "are you glad that you have taken such a long and perilous journey at my behest?"

"I did not dream that such magnificence dwelt upon the earth," answered the proud Queen of Sheba humbly, "for not half the wonders of your court were made known to me. But even more than your power and your wealth have men extolled the wisdom that falls from your lips and daily delights the hearts of your servants."

Solomon knew that she meant to test his wisdom and he was glad. "O Queen of Sheba," he said, "put my wisdom to the test and I will prove to you that men have not praised me too highly." He spoke

arrogantly, for his great power had made him vain and he no longer remembered that both his wealth and his wisdom were from God.

Balkis, the Queen of Sheba, nodded to one of her attendants and the girl, as beautiful as a lily in her white slenderness, came forward, carrying a lily in either hand. The dew seemed to glisten on both of them and both of them seemed to give forth fragrance. The maiden, at a word from her mistress, mounted the steps of the throne and stood before King Solomon, who looked long and earnestly at the flowers she held before his eyes.

"O wisest of kings," said Balkis, and she laughed a little, "surely you can tell me which flower has just been plucked from your gardens, and which was fashioned for me by the cleverest artist in all Arabia."

Solomon looked over the flowers carefully. But the girl would not allow him to touch them, and he was uncertain which

to choose as the flower from his gardens. He began to be very angry with himself and not a little alarmed, for how could he allow the riddle of the Queen of Sheba to go unanswered? Would she not travel home in triumph and tell to all she met: "The wise King Solomon could not answer the first riddle I put to him?"

As he sat perplexed, he heard a loud buzzing just outside the window. His heart was glad for he was not too proud at that moment to learn a lesson from one of the humblest of his subjects. He spoke to the huge negro slave in a purple loin cloth who stood at his side.

"Open the windows," commanded King Solomon.

The slave opened the windows, while the Queen of Sheba and the court wondered at Solomon's command. But a moment later they understood. For a tiny bee came flying into the room and winged its way straight to the lilies which the fair, pale girl held in her two hands.

It lingered a moment, poised in the air, as though it also were confused by the question which had puzzled the wise king. Then, buzzing with content, it lighted upon the flower the girl held in her left hand and began to suck the honey from its golden heart.

Solomon smiled in his beard. "The flower in the maiden's left hand is the flower from my royal gardens," he told the queen, "and the flower in her right has been fashioned by your servant in far Arabia."

The queen pouted a little. "Does King Solomon learn his wisdom from the creatures?" she asked. "Is he not more wise than his subjects?"

Even while she was speaking, a peasant entered the court, dressed in coarse garments, his face white and frightened, a huge and hideous serpent coiled about his neck. The fellow threw himself upon his knees before the throne and gasped a single word: "Justice!"

"You shall have it," promised Solomon. "Speak!"

So the man told his story, gasping for breath, for the serpent choked him sorely.

"I walked in my field at sunset yesterday with a jug of milk in my hand, for I had just milked my goat. I came upon this serpent writhing on the ground and moaning in pain. You may remember, O king, that once in your great kindness, you taught me to speak and to understand the language of all the beasts of the field. I spoke kindly to this serpent and asked him the cause of his suffering. He told me that he was dying of thirst and begged me to give him a drink of milk from my pitcher. If I did, he promised to reward me for my mercy.

"I gave the serpent all he could drink. When he was revived he led me to a great rock, which he bade me roll aside, for a treasure lay beneath it. I rolled the rock aside and found beneath it three bags of gold coins, almost too heavy for one man

to carry. When I stooped to lift one of the bags, this serpent coiled itself about my throat, threatening to strangle me unless I spared his gold ... his gold, O king, which I was claiming for my just reward! But at last I persuaded him to spare my life until we had come before you for judgment."

"Does this man speak truly?" asked Solomon, and the magic images on the steps of his throne, which had all cried out at the man's appearance, now grew suddenly silent to show that he had spoken the truth.

Solomon turned to the serpent and addressed him severely. "First release your hold on the man's neck and descend to the ground," commanded Solomon, "for in my court neither party to a lawsuit may enjoy an advantage over the other." The serpent reluctantly released his victim and slid to the ground. "And now," said Solomon, "you must tell me why you desire to kill this man who saved your life and succored you in your hunger."

The serpent raised his head boldly. "I only obey the Law," he said. "For is it not commanded all serpents to seek to slay men and is it not written in the Torah: 'The serpent shall bruise the heel of man'?"

"Ay," agreed Solomon. He turned to the trembling peasant. "And to you and to all mankind has been given another command, 'You shall bruise the serpent's head.' Therefore it is my judgment that you put your heel on his head and crush him to death for his ingratitude."

The serpent thrust forth its fangs but it was too late. The peasant ground its ugly, venomous head into the ground. He fell upon his knees before Solomon, seeking words with which to thank him.

"O king," he babbled, "I am but a poor man with only a little plot of ground from which I dig the food to feed my wife and my children and myself. But now I have the three bags of gold which the false serpent promised me. Take them, for they are yours."

"Nay," said Solomon, "an honest judge does not blind his eyes with gifts. Enjoy your gold in peace; but one bag I command you to give to the priests to be laid aside for the Temple I shall build on Mount Moriah."

So the peasant departed, promising to bring his thank-offering to the priests on the morrow, and praising King Solomon for saving his life by his ready wit. Queen Balkis marvelled also at Solomon's cunning; she praised him loudly before all the court.

"But," she said, "I do not see how the man could understand the speech of the serpent, for when it spoke to you, I who am not an ignorant peasant, could not translate a single word. Did you indeed teach this man the speech of animals which you alone of the whole world—except, of course, certain magicians—understand?"

King Solomon ordered his servants to spread the tables for dinner. Then he and

Queen Balkis and all the court and the queen's attendants and a number of visitors besides all sat down together. The Queen of Sheba sat at the king's right hand like an honored guest; he often stopped eating to give her some choice bit from his own plate, because the royal cook always sent the king the very best of everything. He told her, too, how many dishes, which she had never tasted before, were prepared. Solomon was so fond of the pleasures of the table that he often forgot the cares of state in planning new dishes with the cooks in the palace kitchen, an employment that was later to bring him a living and a wife. Then at her urgent request he related how the peasant had come to learn the language of animals, but had afterwards come to repent of his knowledge.

The peasant, although an ignorant man himself, was a great admirer of the sages of Solomon's court. Whenever he could spare a few vegetables or fruits from his

own scanty store-house, he was in the habit of bringing a basket of them to the wise men who ate at Solomon's tables. Solomon, upon hearing this, called the man before him and offered him a gift of gold; this the man refused and when Solomon asked him to name his own reward, he replied:

"O king, I am a lonely man, for my children are still too young to converse sensibly with me and my wife is like all women and chatters all day, but says nothing at all. My neighbors I seldom see except on market days and their affairs are so much like my own that their gossip does not interest me. But the animals in my stalls, the birds in their nests, the bees humming in the fields, can all tell me strange secrets and make me wise with a wisdom none of your sages possess. O king, will you not teach your servant the language of the creatures we are foolish enough to call dumb because we do not understand them?"

"And you taught him the secret language of the beasts?" cried the Queen of Sheba. "O King Solomon, teach it to me also!"

"Nay," teased Solomon, "I wish it to remain secret, therefore I will not entrust such instruction to a woman."

"A woman can keep a secret!" exclaimed Balkis.

Solomon shook his head. "Wait until you hear the rest of my story," he warned her and went on with his tale. "I felt sure that I could trust this peasant, so I instructed him in the language of the birds and animals, warning him that if he ever told a word of what he heard from one of his beasts he would be stricken with a fatal disease and pay for his gossiping with his life. He promised me to hold his tongue, so I taught him my secret and sent him away with a final warning not to share his knowledge with a single soul.

"When he reached his farm, he passed the open stable and heard his ox and his ass talking together. He stopped to

listen and was delighted to discover that he could understand every word they spoke. The ox complained that he was overworked from sunrise until sunset but saw no way of escaping his daily toil. The crafty ass pretended to comfort him and advised him not to taste his fodder that evening. 'If our master sees that you do not eat,' said the ass, 'he will think you are sick and will let you rest for a day or two.'

" 'That is good counsel,' said the ox, for he did not suspect that the wily ass was thinking only of his own good.

"The ox followed the ass's advice and did not touch the food his master threw into the manger. Of course, the ass ate not only his own share but also all of the food the ox had refused. This amused the peasant so much that he went into the house laughing loudly at the ass's cleverness; his wife asked him the reason for his mirth; but he remembered that he must tell no one of what he might overhear

among the beasts and he put her off goodnaturedly.

"To punish the ass for the cruel trick it had played upon the ox, he allowed the ox to rest all the next day, while he forced the ass to do not only his own work but the labor of the ox as well. That evening when the farmer drove the ass, almost dead from exhaustion, into the stable, the ox greeted his neighbor eagerly: 'O brother,' he asked, 'did you hear our master say what he intended to do if I pretended to be too ill to work tomorrow?'

" 'Yes, indeed,' answered the ass, who had come home a sadder and a wiser animal. 'I heard my master tell his wife that if you do not show signs of health and begin eating as before, he will slaughter you at once that he may be sure of your flesh and hide if he cannot depend on your labor any longer.'

"This frightened the ox so much that he fell upon his evening's fodder and consumed all of his ration in half the usual

time. He had decided that it would be better to work than to die; while the ass had learned how much easier it was to be content with his own allotment of food and to do only his own share of the labor.

"The peasant was so amused at the ass's discomfiture that he burst into loud laughter. His wife who had come to the stable to milk the goat overheard him; this time she insisted that he should tell her the cause of his sudden mirth. At first the peasant refused; but she began to berate him so severely and weep so loudly that at last he felt he must yield to her desire, although to tell her what he had overheard among the beasts would surely cause his death. For three weeks, day and night, the foolish woman urged him to disclose his secret; at last he decided it would be better to die than to try to live with such a quarrelling helpmate.

"He warned her that if he told her the thing she craved to know, his death would be the penalty. But the foolish woman

had not been able to hold her tongue; she had told all of her friends and kin, when she had met them at the sheep-shearing, that her husband had a great secret which he meant to disclose to her upon a certain day. For you know, O Queen of Sheba, that no woman has ever been known to hold her tongue. These friends had started to torment her with questions; now she was ashamed to tell them that she had not learned the secret she had promised to share with them. She answered her husband and said: 'Even if you must die for speaking, I cannot allow you to keep silent. I must know your secret.'

"The poor husband felt that his doom was near. He begged her to wait until he had put his few affairs in order that he might die in peace. Weeping and lamenting, the peasant went out into the courtyard where the animals, much wiser than mortals, already knew of his impending fate. His faithful dog, who had already

sniffed the garments of the Angel of Death, would touch neither food nor drink; but the heartless cock gaily helped himself to the dog's neglected plate and divided the spoil with his many wives. The dog was angry and began to growl at the impudent cock and his greedy hens. 'Wretch!' snarled the faithful dog. 'How can you be merry and feast while our master is making ready for the grave?'

"But the cock continued to eat and he laughed back at the dog: 'Should I lament because our master is a fool and has invited his own doom? I have ten wives and not one of them dares to disobey a single command of mine or even question me when rebuked. Our master has only one wife but he cannot control her. If he took a heavy stick to the house and thrashed her soundly the next time she dared to open her lips to question him, I promise you she wouldn't trouble him any more about his secret.'

"The peasant was so desperate that he

took the cock's advice. After one good beating his foolish wife ceased to question him; the Angel of Death was obliged to leave him in peace, much to the delight of the faithful watch dog. So now you understand," ended Solomon, "why it is very dangerous for anyone to know the language of the beasts—especially a woman."

Then King Solomon rose from his seat; the Queen of Sheba rose with him and all the court did likewise; Solomon proposed that they should go out together that she might behold with her own eyes the splendors of his land. So they rode forth at the head of a shining cavalcade, Solomon on a black charger with trappings of gold and crimson, Balkis upon a snow-white steed which Solomon had given her for her own, along with its purple saddle and reins of silver.

Suddenly King Solomon reined in his horse and the procession stopped. The Queen asked why the king had called a halt so abruptly. Solomon seemed to

listen for a moment with his head bent low across his saddle pummel; then, smiling a little, he turned his horse's head and guided the animal out of the highway along a narrow and rocky path by the side of the road. Of course, everyone followed the king, afraid to ask him why he had changed his course; everyone, that is, except the Queen of Sheba. Being of a curious turn of mind, she did not care to leave such a strange action go unexplained.

"O king?" she asked, "why did you leave the highway as though obeying some command the rest of us could not hear?"

King Solomon smiled at her question. "As we went along the road," he told Balkis, "I heard the King of the Ants talking to his subjects. He was very much disturbed. 'See, here comes King Solomon,' said the King of the Ants, 'followed by half his court. The feet of their horses will in a moment crush our

cities, the work of many days. Who is this idle king that we, the industrious children of the earth, must make way for him?' "

"You should have crushed him to death for his insolence!" exclaimed the Queen of Sheba.

"Nay," answered King Solomon rebuking her, "before the King of Heaven and Earth, even the highest of earthly kings is almost as lowly as the ants upon their hill cities. Therefore, I turned out of the highway lest their labors should be in vain."

The Queen of Sheba bowed her head in humility. "O King Solomon," she said, "even before I left my home I heard of your wisdom. Today, when I stood before you, I perceived how much wiser you were than the wisest of my sages. But your humility and your mercy are greater even than your wisdom, and for these attributes do I pay you homage." Saying this, she dismounted and bowed in the dust before King Solomon.

Such praise from a proud and beautiful queen was very pleasant in King Solomon's ears; it helped to make him less humble. For by this time he was far too proud of his possessions and his palaces, his wit in deciding the quarrels of men, and his power over the beasts and birds and the powers of darkness. But he was soon to learn that he was only a mortal man.

III

Shortly after the departure of the Queen of Sheba to her country, King Solomon began to build the Temple upon Mount Moriah. This was the very place where in the long ago Abraham had taken his only son Isaac to sacrifice him to God and had been commanded to offer up a ram in his place. God Himself directed Solomon to choose this spot for the site of His Temple, for He caused Solomon to dream one night that if he went up the mountains he would receive a message from Heaven. So Solomon rose from his couch and bade his

slaves robe him in his royal vestments; he called Benaiah, his favorite general, to his side, and together they climbed the mountain which overlooks Jerusalem.

They came upon a field owned by two brothers, farmers, who depended upon their own labor for their daily food. One of the brothers was a bachelor and poor; the other was better blessed with worldly wealth, but had a wife and a large and hungry brood of children to feed. It was harvesting time and the poor brother kept adding sheaves of grain from his own scanty store to swell the grain in his brother's barn, since he felt he could live on very little, while his brother needed a great deal of grain to keep his family from want.

His brother, meanwhile, had worried constantly, since he had garnered a greater harvest for himself in his larger fields with the aid of his half-grown children. Every night he, too, had stolen to his lonely brother's barn to leave a sheaf of grain for

him in secret. Like his brother the elder wondered why the grain in his barn did not diminish; on this very night he had decided to watch for the unknown visitor who had sought to increase his store.

As Solomon and Benaiah waited in the shadows, they saw the younger brother come from his small hut with a sheaf in his arm, cautiously, frightened, like a thief in the night. Almost on the same instant they perceived that the older brother left his larger dwelling and that he, too, carried a sheaf in his arms as he walked toward the house of his brother. They met midway in the field and looked at each other with astonished eyes.

"You have given me of your grain every evening?" cried the younger brother.

"Ay," answered the elder, "and you are the intruder who takes nothing away but leaves a gift behind."

"I wanted your barn well-filled," said the bachelor, "I can do with very little, for I have no children to feed."

"But you have smaller fields and no helpers," answered the married brother.

Before they could say more, Solomon stepped forward. When the peasants perceived the crown upon his head and recognized the face of their king in the moonlight, they prostrated themselves before him. Solomon raised them kindly and bade them not to be afraid.

"Sell me your field," said King Solomon, "for now I understand why God has led me to this place. It is right that on the spot where Abraham showed his love for God, and where two brothers now dwell in such unity and affection, a Temple should rise in which His Spirit may be housed."

Solomon bought the field; soon workmen were busy laying the foundations of the Temple on the hill, which is now known as Mount Zion.

These workmen came from every part of Israel, for there was great rivalry among the people, who all wished to do their share in building the Temple at Jerusalem.

First the sages came before King Solomon to ask permission to set their servants to building the South Wall of the Temple; they knew that the Menorah would shed its light from the South Wall and the servants of wisdom have always been the servants of light and the foes of darkness.

Their slaves started the work at once, even while the priests came before Solomon with their petition to be allowed to build the Northern Wall of the Temple. They knew that before the Northern Wall would stand the Table for the Shew Bread; since it was the duty of the priests to present it to the people, they felt that the Northern Wall should be the work of their servants. At Solomon's command, the slaves of the priests began their work upon the Northern Wall.

Then the rich men came before Solomon, a little arrogantly, with their money bags in their hands. They wanted the Eastern Wall to be theirs, the wall at the very end of the Temple; it was the desire of the

rich men of that day to have a prominent place before all the people, since when they came to worship many of them thought less of God than of the admiration of the poorer folks around the threshold. Solomon granted them their request; the slaves of the rich men immediately began their labor on the Eastern Wall.

Last of all came the poor men before Solomon, very humbly, since none of them possessed slaves to carry out their commands. They pleaded to be allowed to build the last, the Western Wall, and Solomon graciously consented. So the poor men began their labors.

Now the slaves of the wise men, the priests and the rich men were not happy as they worked day after day and the walls began to rise beneath their hands. They worked only as slaves and there was no joy in their labor; often the bricks were wet with their tears. But the poor men worked happily and put their whole hearts into their labor; with every brick they

placed in the Western Wall they praised God and thanked Him for allowing them to have a share in the Temple, which was to tell the whole world of His glory. No wonder that they sang as the wall rose beneath their willing hands.

Hundreds of years later when the enemies of Israel came up to destroy Jerusalem, they fell upon their Temple with their battering rams and banners and axes; three of the walls, the walls reared by the unwilling hands of the slaves of the rich men, the sages and the priests, fell in ruins to the ground. But the Western Wall raised by the poor men of Israel did not fall and it has remained standing until this very day. Because the poor men alone gave of the labor of their hands and did their work with rejoicing, the Western Wall still stands proudly upon Mount Zion although the rest of the Temple has long since crumbled into dust.

While workers from all parts of Israel labored to rear the Temple, Solomon was

constantly troubled by the complaints of his workmen; they had difficulty in cutting the stones to be used in its construction, since the Law forbade the use of steel tools, which are too much like a sword, in erecting a peaceful shrine or altar. But his sages told the king that the workers would have no further difficulty if they could use the *shamir*, a stone endowed with magic properties and capable of cutting the largest rocks. This was the very stone, they said, which Moses had used in engraving the names of the tribes on the precious stones of the High Priest's breast-plate.

Solomon hastily summoned his demons together and asked them how and where to procure the *shamir*. They could not tell him, but suggested that the secret was surely known to Asmodeus, the king of all the demons; when Solomon threatened them, they advised him how to capture the demon king. Solomon at once sent for Benaiah, his trusted general; together

they laid plans for seizing the demons' master, Asmodeus. Presently Benaiah set forth for the mountain where Asmodeus was said to live; he carried with him a chain, a ring on which the wondrous Name of God was engraved, a bundle of wool and a skin bottle filled with sweet wine. When Benaiah reached the mountain home of Asmodeus, he found a huge well. The demons said Asmodeus emptied this well each day when he returned from journeying about the earth. Asmodeus had closed the cistern with a great stone; but Benaiah, who was a man of prodigious strength, rolled it away. He then drew the water from the well through a hole which he bored below; this hole he filled with the wool he had brought; finally he filled the well with wine.

All happened just as the demons had predicted. Near sunset Asmodeus returned home, tired and hot and thirsty. He was a huge creature with an enormous head covered with long and tangled red

hair; his eyes were like burning coals. The most remarkable things about him were his fingers, which were as supple as the fingers of a rubber glove, and his feet, resembling nothing so much as those of a rooster. In all other respects he was very much like an ordinary man.

Asmodeus pushed aside with one shove the heavy stone that had caused Benaiah to pant and puff and perspire. He leaned over the well to take a drink, but drew back in astonishment when he smelt the strong, sweet wine with which Benaiah had filled it. For a while he hesitated, for he knew only too well that strong wine always gave him a splitting headache. But the temptation was too strong for the demon; at last he took a sip of the forbidden drink.

He found the wine from Solomon's own royal cellars so delicious that he at once emptied the entire well. By that time he was so confused and sleepy that he fell senseless upon the ground. With a cry of

triumph, Benaiah sprang upon him and bound him with the heavy ropes, which he had brought with him. Because the demons had warned Solomon that Asmodeus was able to break the strongest hemp as easily as weak twine, Benaiah, while tying the knots, slipped upon his own finger the wondrous ring inscribed with the Name of God, which no man but King Solomon had ever worn before. Thus bound, Asmodeus was as helpless as any mortal when he awoke and tried to break the ropes that held him fast.

Realizing that resistance was useless, Asmodeus prepared to follow Benaiah to the palace as his prisoner. All along the way he did the strangest things, which Benaiah tried to overlook, since no one can expect good manners or even sensible conduct from a demon. He was so boisterous that he kept continually brushing against palm trees all the way and uprooting them as he passed, even upsetting the house of an innocent peasant who had

never done him any harm. Yet he was gentle enough when he set in the right path a blind man who was going astray and assisted a wandering drunkard who could not find the highway. Later he wept to see a happy wedding party go by with music and song; then broke off his weeping to laugh at a magician performing feats of magic and at a tradesman they passed in a village, bargaining with a shoemaker to make him a pair of shoes that would last seven years. Benaiah repeatedly questioned him concerning his strange conduct but he refused to answer him.

But when Asmodeus stood bound before King Solomon, even he for all his impudence trembled before Solomon's majesty and the power of the magic ring he wore; he consented to answer all the wise king's questions.

"Although I delight in playing wild pranks," said Asmodeus, "still I felt obliged to do the blind man a kindness,

because my eyes which see further than the eyes of mortals informed me that this traveller was one of the truly pious and that his grateful prayers would profit me at some later day. On the other hand I felt obliged to serve the drunkard, for although he is a very wicked man, once he did a good deed and I wanted him to receive his reward. I wept at the joyful wedding party, for I knew that the bridegroom has not a month to live; I laughed at the foolish people who believed the magician was endowed with supernatural wisdom, for I knew that at his feet lay a heap of buried treasure of which he had not the slightest knowledge. I laughed also at the tradesman who ordered shoes for seven years, since I knew they would be stolen from him before seven days were over."

These answers convinced Solomon of Asmodeus's wit; he decided to keep him within call even after the demon king had helped him to secure the *shamir*. Upon

being questioned, Asmodeus obligingly told King Solomon just how to secure this precious stone.

"The Angel of the Sea," said Asmodeus, "has given the *shamir* to the moor-hen, who has taken an oath to guard it most carefully. She takes the *shamir* with her to the mountains, which are not inhabited by man, and with it splits the rocks into which she drops seeds, that in time the barren heights may be covered with trees and be fit for human habitation. So you can understand why she will refuse to lend the *shamir* even to you to aid you in building the Temple."

But Solomon devised a most crafty plan for securing the *shamir* from the unwilling moor-hen. He sent Benaiah to the nest where Asmodeus said the moor-hen hatched her young and bade the officer cover the nest with a pane of thick glass. When the moor-hen returned from the mountains that evening and beheld her hungry little ones squirming and crying

for supper under the glass, she became frantic with excitement. Unable to remove the glass, she flew to the secret place where she always kept the *shamir* concealed when not in use; she brought it back in her bill that she might cut the glass and reach her family. As she hovered above the nest with the *shamir* in her bill, Benaiah gave a loud whoop and sprang out upon her from the bushes where he had been hiding. The terrified moor-hen dropped the *shamir* and flew away. Benaiah tucked the magic stone safely in his girdle and hastened to carry it to King Solomon. But first out of the kindness of his heart he removed the glass from the top of the nest that the moor-hen might feed her young.

Solomon was really grateful to Asmodeus for helping him to secure the useful *shamir* and showered him with favor. But, knowing the demon's power for mischief, the wise king decided to keep him a prisoner in the palace and never allowed

him to stir a step without being heavily chained. In time Asmodeus grew so friendly and seemed so content to dwell in captivity that Solomon ceased to mistrust him and easily fell a prey to his wiles.

Asmodeus was far too clever to struggle any longer against Solomon now that he realized the great king's powers. Instead, perceiving at once how easily Solomon was tricked by flattery, the demon Asmodeus tried to beguile King Solomon with his honeyed tongue.

"O King Solomon," said Asmodeus one day, when he and Solomon were playing chess together like old friends, "why do you always wear that curious ring upon your finger?" He spoke very innocently, but he knew that it was the ring that bore the letters of the Name of God, a very terrible word to all demons.

"This ring," answered King Solomon, thoughtfully turning the magic circle upon his finger, "is the source of all my power. While I wear it I am mightier than all the

demons of the land and sea and air, mightier even than you, their king."

"How can that be?" exclaimed Asmodeus in pretended astonishment. "Why should a king as powerful and wise as you have to depend upon a mere ring to insure his power? Take off your ring, O King Solomon, and invoke the demons of the thunder clouds and the lightnings; they will come trembling before you, afraid to meet your eyes. For the power lies in you, O great King, and not in the ring upon your finger."

Solomon had long been of the opinion that he was the mightiest king upon the earth and that there was no limit to his power. The flattering words of Asmodeus pleased him greatly; he drew off his ring, meanwhile invoking the spirits of the lightning and the thunder.

The room suddenly grew as black as midnight; thunder pealed and lightning danced in great jagged lines upon the walls. But it was not the mere command of

Solomon that brought the demons before him. As soon as he put his ring upon the chess board, the wily Asmodeus seized it and thrust it upon his own finger, repeating as he did so Solomon's command to the creatures of the storm.

In the fitful flare of the lightning Solomon was horrified to see the storm demons bowing in homage before Asmodeus, who now wore the magic ring upon his hand. He tried to cry out in protest but his words seemed frozen in his throat. He attempted to reach Asmodeus and tear the ring from his finger. But the king of the demons only laughed at him and gave a command in the language of the demons, which Solomon no longer understood. A dozen of the fiends seized Solomon; before he could cry out they whirled him through the air at such a terrific rate that he swooned away. When he recovered, he found himself in the midst of a great desert hundreds of miles from Jerusalem.

Meanwhile Asmodeus through the aid

of the powerful ring he had stolen from the king was able to assume the shape and likeness of Solomon. He bade the demons dress him in Solomon's royal robes and place the king's jewelled crown upon his head. He mounted the throne of Solomon and all Israel obeyed him as their rightful king. No one, not even his body servants, knew that Asmodeus was wearing the stolen robes and ring of King Solomon. For he always, even at night, wore his golden shoes which hid the feet of a rooster.

IV

Thus Solomon, the greatest of earthly kings, was through his own folly flung from his throne and cast out upon the desert, a homeless, helpless wanderer. He went from place to place, terrified and bewildered, thankful for a crust of bread he could beg from a peasant, trembling on stormy nights as he lay beneath the open sky before the fury of the storm spirits he had once controlled. At first he told every

man and woman he met that he was King Solomon; but everyone only laughed at him and thought him mad.

"King Solomon rules in his palace at Jerusalem," said they. "How can there be two King Solomons? Why should a beggar in rags pretend to be a king?"

At last King Solomon submitted to his fate. He felt that God had punished him for his great pride and had reduced him beneath the level of his lowest subjects to teach him humility. While king in Jerusalem Solomon had often been too busy with his banquets, with his many wives, his charioteering and his riding abroad in state, to think of the God he had served so faithfully in his youth. Now he prayed every day, not only at the stated times when he knew the priests in his Temple at Jerusalem offered up prayers and sacrifices, but as he lay sleepless upon the hard ground at night, or when he tramped begging along the roads beneath the burning sun. Now whenever he prayed, Solomon

never neglected to acknowledge that God was the king of the whole world, and that even the wisest and most powerful of earthly monarchs are as helpless as little children before Him. This he continued to do until at last God pardoned Solomon for his presumption and allowed him to resume his former grandeur.

It happened that after three years of humiliation and poverty, Solomon came to the city of Ammon, and stopped at the kitchen door of the king's palace to beg for a bit of bread. The royal cook was in a very bad humor at that moment because one of his underlings had fallen asleep before the fire and had allowed a choice fowl turning upon the spit to burn to a crisp. The cook had ordered the careless fellow to be soundly beaten and thrust from the palace gates. Now he had the trouble of roasting another fowl himself, for all the other servants in the royal kitchen had been permitted to leave for the day to attend the wedding of the

king's first butler, and there was no one else left to prepare the king's supper.

"You lazy beggar!" cried the cross cook. "Go away at once or you'll feel the weight of my pewter spoon across your back. You ought to be ashamed of yourself, a big, strong man like you begging for food, while some of us have to work for our bread from almost the day of our birth. I wager that if you tell me the truth, you'll confess you've never done anything but beg since the hour you were born."

"No, I never had to labor," confessed Solomon, speaking politely, for he wanted to cajole the peevish cook into giving him a bite for his dinner. "You see, I was once King Solomon and I dwelt in Jerusalem—"

At this the cook burst into loud laughter; he laughed till the tears ran down his cheeks. "You King of Beggars!" he cried, his fat sides shaking with merriment. "Why, I have heard that King Solomon has a hundred cooks in his royal

kitchens, that his tables groan beneath luxuries brought from every corner of the world, that each of his thousand wives has a banquet set out in her own apartment every evening, hoping that King Solomon will dine with her and be so pleased with his reception that he will repeat his visit. Do you think I believe that such a prince of good-livers could ever come to look as ragged and hungry as you?"

"That is true," agreed Solomon, with a watchful eye on the fowl, turning on the spit before the fire.

"I wager you've never seen King Solomon even," said the cook.

"But I have often been in his kitchens," answered Solomon. He spoke the truth; in the day of his kingship he had often gone out into the royal kitchens to invent certain dainties for his state banquets.

At this the cook gave a howl of rage, for he had been so busy talking with Solomon that he had allowed the second fowl to burn before the spit. By this time he

was too hot and angry to care what happened.

"It is my just punishment for idling away my time with a vagabond," he shouted, threatening the exiled king with his enormous soup ladle. But Solomon caught his hand.

"Good cook," he pleaded, "do not be angry with your humble servant. Sit down upon the doorstep and fan your hot brow and drink a cooling drink. Give me another fowl; I will not only see that it is browned to a turn, but I'll prepare a sauce for it composed of spices and honey that King Solomon himself invented to please the palate of the Queen of Sheba."

The cook was glad enough of a chance to rest a little and taste a sweet sherbet which he had been saving out of the king's dessert for his own refreshment. He promised to give Solomon a good supper if he prepared the fowl tastefully and was soon snoring upon the doorstep with an empty sherbet cup in his hand. Solomon

watched the fowl before the fire and prepared such an excellent sauce that the queen who had a very small appetite actually took two helpings and the King of Ammon gorged himself with five. The king sent word to the royal chef that the new sauce pleased him exceedingly; he ordered a fowl to be prepared in exactly the same manner for his dinner the next day. The cook was obliged to hire Solomon as one of the helpers in his kitchen, for Solomon like so many other famous cooks, would not give him the recipe for his sauce, and the poor chef did not know how to prepare it himself.

After that Solomon helped with the cooking in the royal kitchens of the King of Ammon. He prepared such toothsome dishes every day that even the queen regained her lost appetite and began to look forward to her meals; the King of Ammon lost all restraint when at the table and ate so greedily of the new and curious dishes which Solomon devised that the

court physicians were driven nearly distracted, trying to find herbs and simples to cure the royal indigestion.

It was just about this time that the false King Solomon, Asmodeus, was playing ball with the Princess of Egypt, one of Solomon's favorite wives, in the royal gardens at Jerusalem. The princess pretended to like the game just to please him; she much preferred to spend her time in the women's apartments with her lute or needle work; besides she could never throw straight and her awkwardness sometimes annoyed Asmodeus. On this day her ball went wild as usual and bounded right past his nose into the river that watered the palace gardens.

Asmodeus who could never remember that he was a wealthy king with overflowing treasure houses, became very much excited at the thought of losing a ball elegantly traced with gold. He did not wait to call a page; pulling his royal robes up to his knees, he went wading in the

river after it. But when he put out his hand to grasp the ball, an eddy carried it beyond his reach, and, to his great horror, the magic ring, bearing the mystic name of God, fell from his finger and was borne away by the current.

Asmodeus did not dare to tell anybody of his loss. Soon he ceased to worry; he felt that he was now firmly established upon his throne in Jerusalem, since no one knew his secret, and Solomon himself was probably dead of starvation in the far away desert. He ate and drank and was merry and played ball with the Princess of Egypt because he thought she enjoyed it and he wanted to please her; he rode abroad on Solomon's own black charger; he gave many great banquets. But these banquets were never as well attended as formerly because many of the guests missed Solomon's tasty cooking.

In the meantime the true King Solomon became a better cook every day in the palace of the King of Ammon. Finally the

king's birthday arrived; by this time the royal chef, who secretly knew that Solomon was the better cook of the two, ordered his assistant to bake the royal birthday cake. Solomon was delighted with the commission; he prepared a cake the like of which was never seen before, not even upon the royal tables in Jerusalem. It was ten feet across and covered with thick, white sugar frosting ornamented with apples and grapes and pomegranate flowers of various colored sugars. Across the top ran the letters of the King of Ammon's name all done in pink sugar, but not the date of his birth, as the king was growing a little sensitive about his age and aways pretended to be just about fifty, knowing none of his courtiers would dare to contradict him.

When the royal chef proudly brought the birthday cake before the company and set it before the king, everyone from the King of Ammon himself down to the pages who passed the finger bowls ap-

plauded and cried out in admiration. The king was so pleased that he was going to give the chef a present on the spot; but the queen who was a most sensible woman leaned forward and looked the false cook straight in the eye.

'Why didn't you make me such a cake on my birthday last year?" she demanded.

The chef became very much confused. How could he tell the queen that Solomon had not been his assistant at the time without betraying the fact that now Solomon did all the special cooking for the royal family? He stood before the royal couple, turning his white cook's turban in his hand, the very picture of shame and guilt.

"Answer the queen!" cried the king.

The wretched chef fell upon his knees. "Forgive me, O gracious king," he pleaded. "I did not bake such a cake for the queen's birthday because such a piece of pastry is far beyond my power. But now I have in my kitchen a man who seems to be more

than mortal cook, for he has never burned a particle of food; everything he touches seems to turn as though by magic into delicious viands."

"Summon the man who baked that cake," thundered the king, "and if what you tell me be true, I will make him the royal chef and reduce you to the post of his assistant."

Six pages brought Solomon, all sweaty and grimy from his labors; he bowed before the king and the court. The King of Ammon made an eloquent speech, thanking Solomon for his services, and presented him with a golden bracelet from his own arm as a sign of the royal favor and Solomon's new office. Solomon thanked the king, but he was thinking of neither honors nor office at that moment. For his eyes beheld for the first time Naamah, the only daughter of the King of Ammon, sitting in all her young beauty at her mother's side. Looking upon her lovely face and hearing her gentle voice

as she too praised his cake, Solomon suddenly blessed the wicked Asmodeus for having sent him into the kitchens of a foreign king.

The beautiful Princess Naamah knew without a word from Solomon that he loved her; she straightway loved him although she believed him to be nothing more than an exceptional cook. After her father's birthday party she began to find many excuses for visiting the royal kitchens. She pretended that she wanted to learn to cook in case she should ever marry and have a home of her own, which was a very sensible thing to do, since good cooks were very scarce in Ammon. She also said that she was worried over her mother's appetite, which was quite normal by that time; almost every day she consulted Solomon about the queen's menu. Or she would say that she had grown hungry since dinner time and wanted a few cakes for herself or a sherbet. Solomon welcomed her to his kitchen on any pretext

whatever; very soon he managed to tell her how much he loved her. But he did not tell her of the misfortunes which had cast him from his throne; he felt that he would never return to his kingship again and did not want to deceive Naamah with false hopes.

The royal chef who had lost his exalted position through Solomon's skill had never ceased to plan vengeance. The very first time he spied upon the lovers and caught the supposed cook kissing the princess, he went immediately to the King of Ammon and reported what he had seen.

"This man has not only stolen away my position," he said bitterly, "but now he tries to steal your only daughter with his cooking."

The King of Ammon was furious. Summoning Solomon and Naamah before him, he disinherited her and bade his guards take the unhappy lovers to a barren desert, where they would soon die of starvation. Then he restored the spying

cook to his former position as head of the royal kitchens.

The lovers did not starve in the desert, for Solomon had thriftily filled his girdle and the bosom of his robe with all manner of meats and pastries from the king's larder, as well as two bottles of sweet wine. This supply sustained their lives until they reached a city by the seashore, where Solomon sold the bracelet the king had given him and purchased bread for his bride and himself. This trinket was their one possession, since the king, believing that his daughter would surely die, had stripped her of all her royal jewels before banishing her to the desert.

"My love," said Naamah to Solomon, "must we dine on this plain bread? I remember the delicious roast fish you used to prepare for my father's table. Can't we afford a fish—a small fish—just once?"

Solomon was sure that they could not afford to live luxuriously, but he hated to

deny his princess anything. He at once went to a fishmonger and bought the finest and largest fish in the stall. He took it home to the mean hovel which he and Naamah were sharing and she insisted upon helping him open it and prepare it for their supper. Suddenly she gave a great cry of joy, thrust her hand into the belly of the fish she had just split, and held aloft a glittering golden ring.

"Didn't I tell you to buy a fish for supper?" she told King Solomon. "See—the beautiful ring he must have swallowed. We will sell it and be able to afford fish at least once a week until you get another position as a cook."

Solomon took the ring to the window to examine it. It was the very ring Asmodeus had snatched from him long ago, the magic ring the demon had lost in the river, the ring with the mystical Name, which the river had carried to the sea. A fish had swallowed it and now it lay again in King Solomon's hand.

Solomon said not a word. He drew Naamah to him and slipped the ring upon his finger. Now when he called upon the demons of the air they came rushing and whirling before him to kneel humbly at his feet. "Bring me the magic carpet which was mine in Jerusalem," said Solomon, "that my bride and I may return to my kingly city."

Seated upon the magic carpet which moved faster than the wind, Solomon and the King of Ammon's daughter reached Jerusalem in the twinkling of an eye—in fact, before Solomon had time to tell the princess who he really was and the story of his downfall. The carpet stopped before the very throne where Asmodeus sat in his stolen robes, his golden shoes upon his feet. Solomon stepped upon the floor and pointed his finger, wearing the magic ring, straight at the usurper.

"Asmodeus," said King Solomon, "come down from my throne and show yourself in your true shape and likeness!"

The entire palace and the city for miles around resounded with a terrible cry as Asmodeus slipped from his seat and threw himself before King Solomon, begging for mercy. Solomon had no time to answer him then, although he later forgave him on condition that he would do seven good deeds a year and plot no more mischief against man. For poor Naamah, overcome by the swiftness of events since she had found the ring, had fainted and Solomon was obliged to revive her.

When Naamah was restored to consciousness, Solomon told her the whole story; she learned that her lover was no cook at all, but the king over all Israel. Solomon bade the demons build a palace for her comfort, with a very large kitchen where the two often met to devise new dainties together. It was her daughter, Shoshanah, which means the lily, who became the fairest woman in all Israel and for whom Solomon searched in vain for a worthy husband.

V

Of course, King Solomon soon forgot his privations and humiliations as a beggar and an exile. It was not long before he again began to tell himself that he was mightier than the mightiest king upon the face of the earth, mightier than the demons of the earth, sea and sky, mightier even than Fate which rules the lives of all mortal men, be they kings or beggars.

Now one night as King Solomon paced thoughtfully to and fro upon the terrace of his apartments, breathing the sweet-scented roses from the gardens below and looking up at the softly shining stars, he began to think that his fairest daughter Shoshanah was old enough to be married. More than one powerful king had already sought her hand in marriage, for the fame of her goodness and beauty had come to equal the fame of Solomon's wisdom, and every traveller that left Jerusalem sang her praises.

"She must marry the wealthiest and wisest monarch on earth—after me," mused King Solomon. "She must have princesses of the royal blood for her handmaidens; when her husband takes her to her new home, the princes of his realm must strive for the honor of drawing her chariot. For she is not only the loveliest and gentlest lady on earth, but my daughter, the daughter of King Solomon."

Leaning upon the marble parapet, King Solomon raised his eyes again to the star-sprinkled heavens that he might read what destiny the Book of Fate held for his daughter. He was as accomplished in star-gazing as the wisest of his astrologers; the evening skies were as easy for him to decipher as an open scroll. But now as he read, his brow became wrinkled with anxiety. He frowned as he looked at the stars, for he could not believe that he misread their message; yet he was loath to think that he read his daughter's destiny aright. For the stars told him that

his fairest child, Shoshanah, the dearest daughter of the royal household, would not wed a powerful and wealthy king, but the son of the poorest man in all Israel, an unknown youth of the tribe of Naphtali.

Somewhat humiliated that he could not depend upon his own reading of the stars, yet determined to know whether he was mistaken, Solomon at once called his most trusted astrologers to him; together they read the star-sprinkled heavens. When they had finished, no man of them dared to speak first; but upon Solomon's command, they made Nathan, his old teacher, their spokesman.

"O King Solomon," said Nathan, bending so low before the troubled monarch that his long white beard swept the floor, "we are only mortal men and cannot understand the decrees of Fate. We can only wonder at what the heavens tell of your daughter's future, a fate no man of us can explain. For if the stars speak

Solomon at Once Called His Most Trusted Astrologers to Him

truly and we read them aright, the princess will soon wed the son of the poorest man in all Israel, an unknown youth of the tribe of Naphtali."

Solomon was much distressed that his sweetest daughter should be fated to wed a poverty-stricken stranger. He pondered long and thought painfully upon the matter. At last he planned to do what would have seemed both futile and presumptuous in another man: he decided to defy Fate.

King Solomon determined to send the princess to a place far from the court, where no man would ever look upon her face. He called his most skilful workmen before him, workers in stone and wood and iron; he bade them take hewn stones and cedar beams, and set out for an island in the sea that they might build there a great tower, surrounded by seven high walls with iron gates, every gate too ponderous for less than ten men to move upon its hinges. The workmen bowed low

before King Solomon; under the leadership of the faithful Benaiah they journeyed to the desert island and did all the things King Solomon had commanded them to do. At the end of a year they returned to King Solomon, saying: "The tower is finished and we have built the seven walls around it; in each wall an iron gate, just as you commanded us to do."

Solomon ordered the faithful Benaiah to select seventy trusty men from among his soldiers and set them guarding the walls of the tower, ten men at each gate. He sadly took leave of his dear daughter, whom he bade Benaiah convey to the lonely tower, weeping sorely as he parted from his child. The princess wept also, for she knew she would be very lonely out there on the desert island; it grieved her that she would never be allowed to let a man see her face again and would in all likelihood never marry. For Solomon had told her it was better to remain unmarried and secluded all her life than to risk the

fate the stars predicted for her and wed a poor, unknown stranger.

Benaiah escorted the princess and three of her favorite handmaidens, each the daughter of a king, to her tower on the sea. He bade his men raise a ladder that the princess and her friends might mount to the balcony which ran all around the tower, so that Shoshanah might at any time step from her windows and enjoy the sea breezes and the lovely view. When the four maidens were all comfortably settled in their new home, Benaiah respectfully kissed the toe of the princess's little white slipper and withdrew. He ordered his men to take away the ladder and guard the gates so carefully that no one might pass even the first of the seven walls about the tower. Threatening with death any soldier who failed to obey his command, Benaiah returned to King Solomon, who rejoiced that he had so successfully disposed of his daughter's destiny.

Since Solomon was lord over all the birds of the air, it was a simple matter to appoint two great eagles to fly to the princess every day with special dainties from Naamah's own kitchen for Shoshanah and her handmaidens. These two birds also acted as messengers; every day they reported to King Solomon that the princess was well and happy and that no one had come to disturb her solitude. In time Solomon ceased to worry over her welfare and turned his thoughts to other things.

But although the princess did not fail in health and grew more beautiful every day, she was far from happy. She missed the gay life of the court and the admiration of all who had looked upon her, from old Nathan, who was almost blind, but not too blind to admire her loveliness, to the slaves who ran beside her chariot. She grieved most of all that she might have to remain unwed and live in the lonely tower for the rest of her life. The heart of the

beautiful maiden grew very sad; often at night, as she gazed at the stars and thought of the dreadful doom they had predicted, she wept bitterly. But she would always dry her eyes before long, praying that some day a mighty prince would pass through the dreadful seven gates and bring her happiness.

At that time, miles away in the city of Acco, there dwelt a Jewish youth whose parents were humble people, very old and so poor that they had to depend upon the kindness of their neighbors to give them bread. They might have looked to the youth for support, since he was young and sturdy and too generous to neglect his parents in their poverty-stricken old age; but he was not a worker with his hands, only a simple scholar, a poor lover of wisdom. The wisdom of this youth was greater than the wisdom of all the men of the city of Acco, even the wise men who sit in the gate. He knew many proverbs and had written many songs; he knew the

name of every tree and shrub in the country around, the ways of the creeping things of the earth, and the name of every bird hopping among the branches. But his wisdom brought him no bread and he felt ashamed to depend upon charity.

At last the youth determined to go forth into the wide world to seek his fortune. The darkness overtook him as he wandered in a field near Acco, and, shivering with cold, he looked about him for a place where he might lie down and sleep until morning. Besides he wanted to rest a little that he might write a song of a lovely lady he had been dreaming of lately, a woman so fair that he was sure her likeness could not dwell upon the earth. He was delighted to find the skin of a flayed ox lying upon the ground; he crept into it, drawing the warm hide about his shivering, tired limbs. He was so tired that before he had composed more than a line of his song to the beautiful dream maiden he fell fast asleep.

While the youth slumbered beneath the stars, a huge bird, whose name no man has learned to this day, descended upon the earth; seeing the ox's hide, he thought it was a fine piece of carrion for his young. He lifted the skin containing the sleeping youth and flew swiftly away. But when the bird reached the tower of the princess on the desert island, he found his burden so heavy that he was obliged to drop it upon the balcony just outside her window. Then the great bird flew away very much disgusted that he had worked so hard for nothing, and looking about for something easier to carry home as a tasty breakfast for his little ones.

The princess resting within her silk-hung chamber could not sleep, although the cushions of her couch were filled with rose leaves and her coverlets were embroidered with seed pearls. In the last of the night watches she rose and wrapped herself in her royal robes of blue and tissue of silver, and bound her favorite circlet of silver

and emeralds about her head. Then she stole out upon the balcony that she might look upon the sea; her heart was troubled and she thought that the stars and the moonlight and the quiet waters might bring her a little peace.

She stepped upon the balcony and was startled to see a huge brown shape lying upon the marble pavement just before her window. As she came closer she spied a bit of crimson cloth fluttering on the white marble, the young man's coarse robe upon the shining stone. The princess bent over the brown bundle and saw a youth lying within it fast asleep. She gazed long and tenderly upon his face; suddenly her heart was filled with great joy, for she knew that she would never be lonely again and that her days and her nights would be blessed with peace.

It seemed a pity to waken him when he was sleeping so soundly; but the princess was too curious to learn the name and station of her visitor and how he had

THE HUGE BIRD LIFTED THE SKIN CONTAINING THE SLEEPING YOUTH AND FLEW SWIFTLY AWAY

passed the seven gates, to wait till morning. "Awake, O stranger, and tell me how you came here. Tell me of what fair land you are prince and what is your name!" commanded the Princess Shoshanah. She bent over him and her long dark hair, heavy with perfumes, swept his face. The young man stirred and again the daughter of Solomon spoke softly: "O stranger, awake and speak to me; I am very lonely and for many days I have waited to hear your voice."

Then the youth from Acco awoke and seeing the princess, loved her, and could not speak for wonder.

The princess, who was a very inquisitive girl, continued to question him. "Who are you, O prince, and who has dared to bring you to my tower?" She was sure that the handsome young stranger must be a prince almost as powerful as her father, since from her childhood she had been told she would surely make a most royal marriage.

At last the youth spoke and he was sorely bewildered. "Beautiful lady," he began, "I am a very poor scholar and an unknown poet from the city of Acco. I do not know at all how I came to this place. I only know that I went to sleep in this ox's skin under these stars. Now I awake under these stars on this marble balcony with you beside me. I fear that I have slept in the moonlight and that it has brought me strange dreams. Tell me, are you a daughter of earth, or are you one of the strange spirits that are sent to men to drive them mad with their beauty?"

The princess blushed in the moonlight: it was very pleasant to have someone look upon her face and praise her loveliness once more. "Nay, O stranger," she answered modestly, "I am but a simple daughter of Israel."

The young man was still puzzled; he put out one timid hand and touched the sleeve of the rich garment she wore. "But

your robes are like those of a princess," he said, "and you wear jewels upon your head and breast."

The princess was very glad that she was of royal birth; she felt sure the handsome stranger's lineage and breeding must match her own. "True," she answered, "I am the daughter of Solomon, son of David, and king over all Israel."

The youth fell upon his knees before the princess and timidly kissed the hem of her blue and silver robes. "Forgive me, O princess, of whom I have long dreamed," he murmured, "for daring to raise my unworthy eyes to your face. For I am but a humble youth, the son of very poor parents, while you are the daughter of Solomon, King of Israel."

Then the princess knew with certainty that her wise father was very foolish to think that she ought to marry a king or at least a king's son. She gave the poor scholar her hand and raised him to her side. She in turn bowed low before him

until her long dark hair swept his dusty feet. "O stranger," she said, "though you are a humble youth, and I am a princess of Israel and my father's favorite child, my heart was sad until I saw your face. Do not kneel to me! My father is a mighty king, but you shall be my king, and I will be your handmaiden and your slave, for I love you."

Her lover kissed her; then he bared his arm and cut it until his blood flowed. With the blood for ink and God for witness to the ceremony, he wrote the marriage contract which bound him to the princess of Israel and made her his wife forever.

The very next morning the two eagles appeared before King Solomon for their daily reports. At first they feared to tell him the truth, but when the king, noticing their agitation, continued to question them, they said: "O great king, do not be angry with us, for we are still your faithful servants although we bring you evil tidings. We have seen a strange

youth in the tower of the Princess Shoshanah, where the king has commanded no man shall ever come."

Solomon's heart swelled with rage; he vowed that if the eagles spoke the truth he would show no mercy to those who had dared to disobey his commands. He called before him the mighty men who ran before his chariot; together they entered a vessel which shortly brought them to the desert island. When King Solomon reached the first of the strong walls about the tower, he commanded the keepers of the gate to be brought before him and he questioned them; but every man took a terrible oath and said: "Let our lord the king slay us if we have failed to watch this gate both by day and night, five of us sleeping while the other five watched. Let the king slay us without mercy if we have allowed any soul to pass us, even to the second gate."

Solomon called the keepers of the second gate before him, and the keepers of the third, and they all made the same reply,

adding that they had seen no living thing enter the tower. Then he questioned the keepers of the seventh gate and they also swore that they had guarded the walls as Benaiah had commanded them to do.

Finally Solomon and his mighty men entered the high tower and found there the princess and her lover. When Shoshanah saw her father, she ran to him and kissed him, forgetting her fear of his anger in her joy at seeing him again; while the youth in his travel-stained garments stood before them all as proudly as a king.

"Tell me who you are!" commanded King Solomon, as he gazed upon the youth and marvelled at his great comeliness and gentle bearing. "Are you a mighty prince that you dare to woo my dearest daughter?"

"Nay," answered the youth, "I am but a simple scholar, the son of Altamar, a very poor man of the tribe of Naphtali."

King Solomon stroked his beard and his eyes grew large with wonder. "Of

the tribe of Naphtali!" he cried. "The stars spoke truly, for, do what I would, Fate was stronger than I, and my daughter must wed the man destined to be her husband. I will forgive you for your presumption. Instead of punishing you with death for daring to aspire to my daughter's hand, I will give you a province for a wedding gift and make you a prince in Israel."

The poor scholar answered King Solomon proudly. "What do I care for a province and a princely title?" he said. "For I, who went out seeking fame and fortune found love, and I am satisfied."

Then Solomon blessed his daughter and her husband. They remained in their tower by the sea, for the princess no longer cared to live in her father's court, where many men might look upon her face and praise her beauty. The poor scholar of Acco extolled her loveliness in many songs, some of them as sweet as those which bear the name of Solomon, but

unfortunately they have all disappeared from the face of the earth. On the desert island the husband of Shoshanah became famous for his wisdom, just as she was famed for her beauty even in her later days. Here they grew old together and loved each other dearly until the day of their death.

King Solomon knew that they were happier in their humble tower than he in his great court with his palace gardens and his horses. He never ceased envying them; nor did he ever again question the truths which the stars revealed to him when he paced thoughtfully up and down the terraces at night. For Solomon in his old age grew very humble and realized at last that no man can be mightier than Fate.

THE FRIEND OF THE NEEDY

VI

THE FRIEND OF THE NEEDY

In the very beginning of things, before the world was made, the angels heard that God contemplated making Man. Then one of the fiery host which stand before God's throne, the angel Sandalfon, came up to God and said:

"Master of the World, if it be pleasing in Thine eyes, I will descend to earth and make myself serviceable to the sons of Man."

"Be it so," said God, and Sandalfon bowed low before Him.

Thus it happened that in the reign of the wicked King Ahab of Israel, the angel Sandalfon assumed the shape of a man, Elijah, a great prophet in the land, and performed many miracles which are remembered to this day. At the end of his

life Elijah did not die as other men die; he was caught up in a chariot of fire and was borne up to heaven again. For many years after that the sons of men never saw Elijah again; but at last he bagan to walk the earth from time to time, helping now this man and now that, until he became known as the Friend of the Needy.

II

In the years after the Temple was destroyed, there grew up in the land of Israel many learned men who took the place of the prophets and priests of the olden times; they were called rabbis and they taught the people. Among these rabbis no man had greater honor for his piety and wisdom than Rabbi Joshua; perhaps because his good mother had carried him in his cradle to the House of Study and allowed him to stay there all day that his unconscious ears might drink in the holy words of those about him. When he grew up, he worked every day at

his profession of making needles that he might not feel obliged to take pay for his teaching; but he always found time to study and to teach. Soon people came from every corner of Palestine to listen to his words and to ask him to decide questions which puzzled them.

But there were many questions that Rabbi Joshua himself could not answer. God, realizing that the truly pious starve for wisdom as other men hunger for bread, sent the Friend of the Needy to enlighten him.

One evening just after sunset Rabbi Joshua sat before his door, enjoying the cool breezes and pondering over many things. Suddenly his dog and the dogs of several of his neighbors began to bark loudly; Joshua arose and looked down the road, but he could see no one. The barking continued; the yelping animals began jumping about and fawning upon an unseen visitor. Rabbi Joshua was perplexed until he remembered that when

dogs bark without a cause, they do so to greet the prophet Elijah, for he becomes visible to them before he appears before the eyes of men.

Sure enough, down the road came a man, very old and white-haired, yet strong and vigorous; his back was unbent by age, his eyes bright and piercing, and he walked with the step of a youth. He wore a coarse brown robe and a turban made of the same material; there was a traveller's pack upon his back and in his hand he carried a traveller's staff. Rabbi Joshua knew at once that it was Elijah coming to him through the early dusk, and he went to meet him.

"Peace be upon you," said Rabbi Joshua, secretly wondering what he had done to deserve the honor of a visit from the prophet.

"And upon you be peace," answered Elijah. "Have you a piece of bread to share with a wayfarer tonight and a bed in which he may sleep until morning?"

RABBI JOSHUA WELCOMED THE PROPHET AND GAVE HIM THE BEST HIS POOR LARDER PROVIDED

Rabbi Joshua warmly welcomed the prophet under his humble roof and gave him the best his poor larder provided, a portion of coarse bread, a cup of thin wine. He begged Elijah to rest upon his own couch while he himself lay upon the ground, sleeping as peacefully as though upon a bed of down; he was very grateful for the honor of being allowed to extend hospitality to his distinguished visitor.

It was not until Rabbi Joshua had shared his frugal breakfast with Elijah that he ventured to inquire of the prophet the cause of his visit. "Who am I that you should honor my poor home with your presence?" he asked.

Elijah smiled, well pleased at the Rabbi's humility. "One does not bestow a fair colored garment upon a blind beggar," he answered, "or instruction upon those who shut their ears to wisdom. You have given me bread which I lacked; I can give you in return a little of the wisdom that you hold more precious than bread and

sweeter than honey. How shall I reward you for your hospitality?"

"I have been told that you often wander from place to place," answered Rabbi Joshua, "passing up and down the world, doing good deeds along the way. Let me, I pray you accompany you on your journey."

"You have chosen wisely," said Elijah, well pleased. "Gird up your robes for a long journey; bind new sandals upon your feet and take your traveller's staff in your hand. We will travel many miles together before you again cross the threshold of your house."

Rabbi Joshua joyfully prepared for the journey with Elijah. When they were ready to set out, the prophet turned to give the sage one word of warning. "You will see many strange things while you travel with me," he said, "and I will often perform deeds that are past your understanding. But I warn you that if you ask me one single question concerning my

conduct, I shall feel obliged to disappear and you will never see me again."

Rabbi Joshua willingly consented to refrain from all questions and the two set out upon their journey. Very soon they reached the city of Jabneh; they stood together outside the great Academy where the leading rabbis of Israel taught and studied. As the scholars passed them to enter the House of Study, Rabbi Joshua asked Elijah which of them would occupy a place of distinction in Paradise. "For these are surely the worthiest men of all Israel," thought the Rabbi, "since they devote their whole lives to the study of the Law."

Elijah smiled and drew Rabbi Joshua toward the market place. There a crowd of people, chiefly peasants from the outlying farms who had come to town with their fruits and vegetables, stood in a merry group, applauding and laughing. "Here are the two men in the city most worthy of a crown in Paradise," said Elijah.

Rabbi Joshua pushed his way through the crowd, expecting to see either several great scholars or saints, the pious men who after the fall of Jerusalem afflicted themselves in many ways, even denying themselves meat and wine because the sacrifices of animals and wine were no longer offered upon the altar of the Temple. To his great surprise he saw instead two acrobats, two clowns, dressed in ragged finery of many colors, with bells upon their ankles and upon their wrists. They danced madly about, jumped over each other's backs, walked on their hands, and tumbled and capered around the circle like overgrown puppies. The crowd stood by laughing and applauding, now and then throwing a small coin into the ragged cap which lay upon the ground.

"Do you see those two clowns?" asked Elijah. "They will surely occupy comfortable seats in Paradise!"

Rabbi Joshua was astonished. "But they are only jesters and tumblers," he

faltered, "who perform foolish antics for a few coins every day. They often eat forbidden food; they sometimes neglect to come to the synagogue. What share can such vagabonds have in the world to come?"

"Do you hear the country people laughing at their capers?" asked Elijah. "These poor souls have worked hard in their fields all week; now they have had a weary journey along the roads with their produce on their backs. They are warm and sweaty and tired. But these fellows laugh and make them forget their troubles; that is blessed work. Best of all, these two clowns delight in searching out people who have quarrelled; by making them laugh at some absurdity together they pave the way for friendship between the two enemies. Is not the wisdom of these two ignorant fellows as worthy as the book learning of the rabbis in yonder Academy?"

When he heard this, Rabbi Joshua bowed his head humbly and acknowledged

that Elijah had spoken truly and that the two vagabonds were worthy of reward in the world to come.

Suddenly Elijah burst into loud laughter although Rabbi Joshua could not see any cause for his merriment. The prophet pointed to a richly dressed merchant who stood on the outskirts of the crowd, laughing heartily at the antics of the two clowns.

"Stand apart with me," said Elijah, "and I will tell you why I always laugh when I look upon that merchant's face. But I do not wish him to see me or he will have embarrassing memories." Then he told Rabbi Joshua how this very merchant had once been so self-confident and boastful that God sent Elijah to teach him humility.

"One day in early springtime," began Elijah, "our friend over yonder set out from his estate with a heavy pouch of gold firmly secured in his girdle. He was on his way to the nearest town to buy a

yoke of oxen at the cattle fair. He had not earned his own wealth; he was the only son of a thrifty and prosperous father. But since he inherited his father's estate, the merchant began to take credit upon himself for all his good fortune; he was foolish enough to believe that he was clever and strong enough to accomplish whatever he set out to do, even without God's aid. So I was sent to teach him a lesson.

"You know, of course, that I can journey from place to place swifter than the swiftest eagle; it was an easy matter for me to overtake our traveller on the way to town. He did not know I was Elijah; so when an old man in a poor brown robe accosted him, he asked me rather roughly what I wished.

" 'Where are you going and what do you intend to do at the end of your journey?' I asked him politely.

" 'It is none of your affairs, old father,' answered the merchant. 'But I do not

mind telling you that I am on my way to the cattle fair to buy a yoke of oxen.'

"'You should say: "I shall accomplish all this, if it is the will of God,"' I advised him.

"But the merchant only laughed at me. 'I shall buy cattle whether it please God or not!' he said, 'for I carry the money with me,' and he slapped the bag of gold pieces hidden in his girdle.

"Since I had warned him and he would not listen to me, there was nothing left for me to do but to punish him. I bowed courteously and bade him farewell. But I followed him unseen to see what he would do.

"The day being hot and the dust of the road thick and choking, our merchant soon dismounted from his horse, tethered it to a tree, and knelt beside a little wayside brook that he might drink. Having drunk his fill, he mounted his animal again and went on to the fair. But I lingered behind to pick up the purse which had

dropped from his girdle upon the grass near the brook.

"Finding himself penniless at the fair, he had to return to his home without his oxen. The very next month he again set out for town, his bag of gold securely knotted in his bosom. Perhaps he wished to avoid me, for he took a different road from the one which he had followed on the day of our first encounter.

"I managed to overtake him again, and again I asked him the same question. For the second time he told me arrogantly that he intended to buy cattle at the fair. When I rebuked him for ignoring the will of God, he laughed at me, showing me that he had fastened his purse so securely that he would not be likely to lose it again. I pretended to leave him; but from behind the bushes that skirted the road to the fair I saw a band of robbers fall upon our friend, beat him most severely and rob him not only of his bag of gold pieces, but of his horse and his fine saddle blankets

as well. The merchant turned his face homeward, cursing and lamenting; I began to hope he had learned his lesson. Then I followed the robbers and without the slightest difficulty persuaded them to return the stolen gold to me.

"Just a month later I met our merchant on his way to the fair; for the third time I accosted him and asked him his destination and the reason for his journey. This time he answered me very humbly: 'Old father, I do not know who you are or why you have interested yourself in my affairs; but I am glad to tell you that I go to the cattle fair to buy a yoke of oxen—if God is willing.'

"Well pleased at his humility, I restored his two lost bags of gold to him and gave him my blessing. When he arrived at the fair, he was able, because of his unexpected wealth, to purchase a much finer pair of oxen than he had expected to buy. The animals he bought proved a most excellent bargain; later he sold them to a foreign

king for a very great price. Now I allow him to go on his way undisturbed, since he is willing to acknowledge that his good fortune is due not only to his own shrewdness, but to the bounty of God."

Elijah and Rabbi Joshua set out upon the open road and began their journey in real earnest. By nightfall they reached two fine country estates, bordering either side of the road. Each estate showed well-planted vineyards and flourishing fields; in the center of each stood a comfortable stone house for the master, surrounded by the small huts of the farm laborers, serving men and their families. Torches burned in each house and the door of each stood hospitably open; the two dwelling places seemed exactly alike in every respect and appeared to offer the same promise of a night's comfort to the travellers. But Elijah without a moment's hesitation avoided the estate on the right and led Rabbi Joshua toward the dwelling upon the left of the road.

Rabbi Joshua opened his lips to ask the reason of the prophet's choice; then he remembered that he had promised to ask no questions, so he closed his mouth tightly again.

Elijah seemed to read his thoughts. "These two fair estates are owned by two brothers of equal wealth and position," he said; "I have dined at both homes, and in both houses have I received a hearty welcome. But now I always shun the house upon the right; for on the one occasion when I dined there I was shocked to see that the master allowed his servants to eat only of the first course, giving them only remnants of the courses that followed. The master of the house upon the left, where we will spend the night, provides his servants from his own table. So I always accept his hospitality and hope that some day I may be able to repay him."

The opportunity came earlier than even Elijah with his knowledge of the future imagined. When they entered the house

they found not a living soul to receive them, and passed the gates and the vestibule into the inner court unattended. There Elijah and the rabbi found the master of the house, Rabbi Reuben, sitting at the head of a long table, spread for a banquet. Around the table were gathered Rabbi Reuben's own family and his more distant kinsfolk and certain of his neighbors, all in their richest attire; at his side sat his only son, a youth of seventeen, in a plain white robe, and a fair young girl in the veil and myrtle wreath of a bride. Everyone of that splendid company sat bowed in grief; the young bride wept aloud and the bridegroom sat in his place as pale as death.

"My friend," Elijah asked the host, approaching him, "if you have asked these good neighbors to a feast, why do you not rejoice instead of bowing your head in mourning?"

Rabbi Reuben raised his bowed head and spoke sadly. "Alas!", he said, trying

to control his sobbing, "I am the most unhappy man upon the face of the earth. This youth," and he laid his hand upon the young man's shoulder, "is my only son and heir and the apple of my eye. I thought to see him pass under the marriage canopy and to hold his children upon my knee before I died. But now I must close his eyes in death."

Rabbi Reuben broke into bitter wailing and the rest of the company took up his lament. The young man in the plain white robe, which Rabbi Joshua now perceived was a shroud, was the first to recover himself sufficiently to speak.

"A month ago," said the young man, "the Angel of Death came to my father here and told him that I would die before the new moon. My father pleaded that I be allowed to live but thirty days longer that I might marry this maiden, his ward, an orphan whom he loves as his own child; so that at least she may bear our name and at my father's death inherit the

wealth which he hoped to bequeath to me. The Angel of Death consented to allow me to live just one month more; but today is the thirtieth day and these friends who have come to witness my wedding are now lingering to support my father in his grief when the Angel of Death appears to summon me for a second time."

The bridegroom's father rose and caught Elijah's robe and bowed humbly before him. "You have always been a welcome guest at my table," he said, "and on more than one occasion you have promised to grant any desire I might ask of you. Now save my son, for he is dearer to me than life itself."

"But I am also powerless against the Angel of Death," said Elijah.

"Say no more, my father," interrupted the young bridegroom, "for who may oppose God? Am I better than Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? They, too, had to die. So let us mourn no longer but enjoy the feasting and the merry-making until

the Angel of Death again appears before us."

"He will come very soon," Elijah told the company, "in the disguise of a dirty, ragged beggar. Treat him with all courtesy and invite him to take his place at the banquet table. When he demands the life of the bridegroom, let the bride herself answer him, for sometimes woman's wit can unravel the hardest knots."

Just at midnight the guests, moved by a strange impulse, all turned together to look toward the open door. There stood a beggar, very ragged and dirty, his long, matted hair falling over his face. He spoke no word, but advanced to the banquet table and stood behind the bridegroom.

In a voice that trembled a little the bridegroom begged the unwelcome guest to take his place beside him. The young man offered the terrible visitor food and drink, the choicest of tidbits, the rarest of wines. The strange beggar ate and drank

greedily all that was put before him; now and then he held out his plate or glass for more food or wine, but he spoke not a word.

When at last he seemed satisfied, the Angel of Death rose and placed his hand upon the young man's shoulder. The bridegroom, like a man in a dream, left his place and prepared to follow him. But the lovely bride sprang to her feet and threw her arms around the husband's neck as she fearlessly confronted the Angel of Death.

"You dare not take my husband away tonight," she cried boldly. "Is it not written in the Torah that the married man is exempt even from military duties for a whole year after his wedding? Grant my husband his year of life that we may be happy together. Return in one year and I, too, will go with you, for I do not care to live if he must die."

"I will go away," answered the Angel of Death, "and I will not return for your husband for many years. Instead I will

allow him to live the natural span of a man's life, threescore years and ten. When his years number seventy, I will claim both your life and his together."

As he spoke, the stranger's dark and loathsome rags fell from him. He stood before the startled company, a splendid figure garmented in light, a crown as dazzling as the sun about his fair head, a two-edged sword in his hand. The wedding guests hid their faces before the blinding brilliance; when they looked again, the place where the Angel of Death had stood was empty.

The guests gathered about the newly-wedded pair, congratulating the bride-groom and praising the bride for her courage and wit and devotion. Elijah took the sleeve of Rabbi Joshua's robe and drew him from the room, unobserved, placing a finger upon his lips to insure his silence. It was not until they were again under the stars that the prophet spoke.

"I know what question trembles upon your lips," he said smiling. "You wish to ask me why I did not try to save the young man myself instead of leaving his fate hang in the balance and depending upon the maiden's wit. It is a good thing that all the years of his life the husband should feel grateful to his wife for saving him. It is a better thing that her terror and her grief should have led her to offer her life itself for his safety. I could have done nothing but save him from the Angel of Death; her action has bound them together through all the happy years of their married life."

The night was by this time well over; dawn broke over the quiet road and the gray fields where the cattle still slumbered. Rabbi Joshua began to feel a great desire for sleep; but he did not dare to propose resting until his guide suggested that they should halt and rest themselves in the shadow of a great rock near the road. Here they slept peacefully until the sun

was high in the heavens; rising, the two travellers washed their hands in a little brook they discovered among the bushes, recited their morning prayers together, and again set out on their journey.

Elijah resembled the angels in this respect that he never was troubled by the pangs of hunger and thirst; he seemed to forget that they had taken no breakfast and Rabbi Joshua felt shy about suggesting means for obtaining their morning meal. But as usual Elijah read his unspoken thoughts and answered him just as though Rabbi Joshua had spoken out loud.

"We will not stop in this house," he said, pointing to a beautiful mansion surrounded by broad fields and flourishing orchards and vineyards. "For many years I was a constant visitor there, and you may be sure I always paid well for my entertainment. But two years ago I was surprised to see that the master had caused a large vestibule to be built before

the door. When I asked him the reason for the change, he confessed that because of his great wealth his doorway was always crowded with beggars; the sounds of their pleading voices and their lamentations disturbed him when he sat at his own well-spread table. He built the vestibule so that when he took his own meals he should not be disturbed by the hungry voices of these unfortunates who were forced to beg their bread. Since that day I have never crossed his threshold, for the man who closes his door to the poor and unfortunate closes it also upon Elijah, the Friend of the Needy."

"This man does not deserve the honor of your visits," Rabbi Joshua agreed. "But still I am very hungry," he added plaintively to himself.

"If you are hungry," Elijah answered him, "why do you not eat what is set before you?" and he pointed to a tree near the roadside, its hollow trunk overflowing with wild honey. From his girdle, which

seemed much too small to hold such a large loaf, the prophet drew forth newly baked bread and held it out to the astonished Rabbi. When Rabbi Joshua had eaten his fill of this delicious breakfast, his guide pointed to a cow which had strolled leisurely up to them.

"Her udders are heavy with milk," said Elijah. "Fill this," and he produced a cup from his girdle, "and drink until you are satisfied." Seeing Rabbi Joshua hesitate, he seemed to understand his reluctance. "Do not be afraid that you will rob the animal's owner of the milk. I promise you that for seven whole days this good beast will give thrice her usual supply of milk to recompense him."

By nightfall the travellers reached a large city, whose name no man knows today, for the sands of the desert cover it; in the midst of the city stood a magnificent synagogue with a dome of many colored stones, the very seats being of gold and silver. But the inhabitants of this place

were churlish people, whose generosity fell far below their wealth. When Elijah after the evening service went to the elders in the synagogue and asked for a night's lodging and refreshment for his travelling companion and himself, every man suddenly found an excuse to hurry away to his own home. Only the beadle remained; when Elijah again asked him for food and a bed, he answered curtly: "On the table in the ante-room you will find the bread and water which is always left there for the poor. If you are weary, you can stretch out upon one of the benches and sleep, thanking your good fortune that you have found such a magnificent bed."

You may be sure that as soon as the beadle had left them, Elijah provided a feast of roast flesh and sweet cakes and wine, a feast as fine as the banquets which the selfish rich men of the synagogue were doubtlessly enjoying in their own homes at that very moment. After eating, the

two recited their prayers, and lay down to sleep upon one of the golden seats in the synagogue.

"Although they are made of gold, these seats make very hard beds," said Elijah just before he went to sleep, "but no harder than the cruel hearts of our selfish hosts. I shall see to it that they are severely punished."

Rabbi Joshua was most curious on the morrow to discover just what punishment Elijah would mete out to the selfish elders when they came to the synagogue for their morning prayers. But Elijah only bowed to the company very politely on taking his departure, thanking them for their entertainment, and desiring that every man present might some day be the ruler of the community.

Rabbi Joshua was greatly puzzled, but he dared not question Elijah concerning his words to the selfish elders. He was even more perplexed after they had spent a night in the next town, where the elders

of the synagogue actually quarrelled for the honor of entertaining the two strangers, gave them a delicious supper and comfortable beds. Yet after all this kindness, Elijah never hinted a reward; when he left the town he told the elders; "May God give you but a single head."

"I am sure you think me most ungrateful," Elijah told Rabbi Joshua as they journeyed together. "Because you have held your tongue and not troubled me with questions, I will be glad to explain my words. You thought I promised honors to our selfish friends when I promised that each man would become a ruler in the community. But the result will be that each will think himself capable of ruling in the city and in the synagogue; there will be endless dissensions and in time their own quarrels will destroy their prosperity and contentment. On the other hand, I really blessed our kind hosts of this last town by praying that God would give them a single head; with one ruler,

whom they can admire and obey, the people of that community will be sure to increase in wealth and happiness."

That night the two slept in the hut of a poor man whose one earthly possession was a cow. The host and his wife shared their own humble supper with the wayfarers and made them up a comfortable couch for the night. Yet when they were ready to depart after a tasty breakfast the next morning, Elijah actually prayed that the poor man's cow would die. As Rabbi Joshua passed through the gate he could hear the peasant's lamentations over his dead animal.

"How could you destroy that good man's one piece of property?" Rabbi Joshua wanted to ask Elijah, but the prophet, seeing him about to speak, interrupted him. "Wait until we seek shelter and food tonight and then observe how I repay hospitality," he said.

Their next host proved to be a surly fellow, as selfish as he was rich. When

Elijah asked for a night's lodging he pointed to a heap of straw in the corner of his barn and left his guests without a word. The next morning he did not even offer them any breakfast, but pretended to be too busy supervising his servants, whom he had set to work upon repairing a broken wall in his house. Yet Elijah, instead of appearing angry, thanked the master most heartily for his kindness.

"I do not wish your courtesy to go unrewarded," said Elijah, "so I will repay you for your friendliness even before I bid you farewell. Why should you spend time and gold having yonder tumbled wall repaired?" The prophet's lips moved silently; in another moment the broken wall rose from the ground new and firm and freshly mortared.

The rude master of the house began to thank Elijah, but Elijah waved him aside, took up his staff and bade Rabbi Joshua follow him. When they were well out of the courtyard, he turned to Rabbi Joshua

and said: "Now you see how I reward unwilling hospitality!"

"I am more in the dark than ever," confessed the Rabbi. "When the poor man treated us kindly and divided his own scanty store with us, you caused the death of his one cow. This man insulted us, yet you rebuilt his wall for him."

"You are among the wisest men of your generation, Rabbi Joshua," answered Elijah, "but the ways of God are often too dark for even you to read. Often what seems to be a misfortune is no misfortune; often what seems to be a stroke of good luck is a very grievous thing. I knew the poor man's wife was doomed to die at once; I secretly prayed to God to spare her and afflict her husband with a lesser misfortune, which proved to be the death of the cow. I also knew that in this ruined wall a great treasure was hidden, which our churlish friend would have surely found if his servants had started to repair it. Now do you reproach me for

erecting the wall myself and depriving him of such undeserved good fortune?"

"No, indeed;" answered the Rabbi warmly. "I will never doubt your wisdom again." He meant to keep his promise; but more than once on his journey he felt tempted to question the prophet upon his actions which he found so hard to understand.

III

In a certain village which the two companions passed in their wanderings, there lived a very pious man who owned a fine spice garden. At his death he bequeathed it to his three sons, Nathaniel, Joseph and Ezra. These three brothers would have been content to live together in peace and good fellowship till the end of their days, sharing their common inheritance, had not thieves entered the spice garden one dark night, stripped the bushes bare and stolen away with their booty. The brothers now found themselves almost

penniless, since the finest of their spices had been stolen. However, they did not lose heart but determined to keep watch in their garden every night that the spices which still remained might be saved for the market.

"It is a pity that the sons of such a pious scholar should suffer such misfortune," Elijah told Rabbi Joshua. "They are peace-loving and honorable youths and it is well that each should receive the desire of his heart. Tonight I will go to the spice garden and bestow my blessing on the brother who keeps watch there."

It was in the first hours of the night watches and the new moon glistened like an Arab's curved sword against the blue sky. The first-born son, Nathaniel, was already at his post in the spice garden, a knife thrust through his belt, a heavy cudgel at his feet, as he sat upon the ground resting his head against a tree trunk. Nathaniel must have grown drowsy as he sat there, for he afterwards remem-

bered nothing of the passing of the hours until he opened his eyes and saw standing before him a very old man, dressed in a brown cloak and carrying a traveller's staff in his hand. Half awake and startled, the lad reached for his knife; but the old man caught his hand.

"Fear not, my son," said the strange visitor, "for I have come to do you good, not evil. I have come to ask you which you prefer: knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful and virtuous wife?"

The young man did not lose much time in considering this unusual question. "My father was among the wealthy men in Israel," he said, "and it was always the desire of his heart that this fine spice garden, our inheritance, should never pass out of our hands. But thieves have entered our spice garden and the long drought has caused our choicest trees and shrubs to wither and die. Unless we can gather enough gold to satisfy our creditors we will be obliged to sell this precious

possession and go homeless and naked out into the world."

The old man did not seem displeased at the youth's answer. 'You are a worthy son of a worthy father," he said, "and it would not be right for you to lose your rightful inheritance." Saying this, he drew a gold coin from his girdle and placed it in the wondering youth's hand. "Put this coin in the earthen water vessel which stands upon the bench at the garden gate," he said, "and hide the vessel under your mattress for three nights. Tell no one of my visit or my words, but on the morning of the third day, draw forth the water jar. Use the gold which will then fill the jar to overflowing to pay your creditors; do not fear to share it lavishly with the poor just as your father did before you. For as long as you conduct yourself as your father's son, the jar will never be empty."

Then the youth discovered that he was all alone again; he would have thought his

aged visitor nothing more than a figure in a dream, had not the gold piece which glimmered in his hand proved that he had been awake. Sure enough, after he had hidden the gold in a jar for three days, the jar was filled to overflowing. Although the young man paid his creditors at once and bought some land adjoining the estate which his father had long craved, and also gave liberally to all the poor and the needy, still the jar of gold remained full to overflowing. So the danger he feared most was averted; his father's spice garden remained in the possession of Nathaniel and his sons after him for many years.

But thieves still preyed upon the spice garden; so now the second brother, Joseph, promised to guard it for a night. Armed and prepared to meet intruders, he took his position under a tree, his mind busy with certain passages from the Torah he had heard read in the synagogue that morning. So absorbed was he in his thoughts that he did not know he was no

longer alone, until he looked up to see an old man standing in front of him, his hair and long beard snowy white in the light of the full moon.

"You do well to ponder upon the teachings of the Holy Book, my son," said the old man very kindly. "I see no reason why I should not deal as generously with you as with your brother. Tell me, which do you desire the most: knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful and virtuous wife?"

"The price of wisdom is above rubies," answered Joseph promptly. "Give me more knowledge and I will be satisfied."

The old man drew a scroll from his girdle and bade Joseph read in it every day, but to tell no one, not even his brothers, what he read therein. Joseph obeyed him gladly; very soon his fame for learning grew until he came to take his place among the foremost scholars in all Israel.

It happened that on the night the

youngest brother, Ezra, kept watch in the spice garden, he wept long and bitterly, his face hidden in his hands. Suddenly aware that he was not alone, he looked up to see an old man with a traveller's staff standing at his side. For a moment the aged stranger did not speak. The young man trembled with awe, strangely oppressed by the great stillness which had come over the spice garden. There was no sound save a low rustle of leaves as the night wind moved over the place; while low in the horizon the last quarter of the moon, very old and tired, sank out of sight.

At last the old man spoke. "You are a good youth and I have heard many tongues speak well of you; I come to reward you not only for your father's memory but for your own sake. Why are you so sad, and what can I do to lighten your misery?"

"I do not know why I should be so sad," answered the young man, now very much ashamed of his tears. "My father's in-

heritance keeps me from want; I am strong and sturdy with the best of my life still before me. But I am very often lonely; my eldest brother is kept busy managing his vast estate and caring for his own family; my second brother is so absorbed in his books and in the discourse he hears and delivers in the House of Study, that he often forgets his kinsman. I am very lonely although I have many faithful friends."

At this the old man's eyes seemed to twinkle; he passed one hand over his mouth as though to conceal a smile. "You deserve as well of me as your two brothers did," he answered, "but I am not sure whether you will care for any one of the three gifts I have to offer you. However, listen well and choose wisely. Which do you prefer, knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful and virtuous wife?"

The young man sprang to his feet, his face beaming with sudden joy. "Now I know why I have been so miserable and

lonely!" he exclaimed. "I wanted a wife. Pray give me a wife at once for I would prefer her to great learning or unlimited wealth."

"You have indeed chosen wisely," answered the old man kindly. "I cannot give you a wife at once, for to choose a good wife is a far more difficult task than to acquire wealth or wisdom. But be assured that somewhere in the world waits the maiden who was destined to be your bride long before either of you was born upon this earth. Come with me and I will help you find her."

The young man gladly girded up his robes for a journey, took a traveller's staff and cloak and followed the old man who, you must have guessed already, was Elijah. Rabbi Joshua accompanied them, for he too was very anxious to learn how and when the youth should find his destined wife.

On the first night of their journey they slept in an inn where the landlord received

them with all possible courtesy. He set a delicious supper before the three travellers, which Elijah and Rabbi Joshua enjoyed heartily; but young Ezra scarcely tasted a morsel, so absorbed was he in watching the landlord's pretty daughter, Miriam, who waited upon them. When they retired to their room for the night, Ezra begged Elijah to ask the landlord for his daughter's hand at once, saying that he desired to go no further on his quest for a wife since she was the most beautiful maiden his eyes had ever seen. But Elijah chided him for his impatience.

"Beauty is deceitful," he said, "and the young girl may not be half so desirable as you think her upon first sight. Go to sleep now. When you awaken early in the morning listen carefully to any words that may be spoken beneath your window. Then if you still wish to marry the maiden, I shall act as your match-maker."

Early the next morning Ezra was awakened by the loud cackling of the

geese and hens beneath his window. To his great surprise he was able to understand them. Remembering Elijah's command, he listened very carefully to their conversation.

"We will have fine pickings for our breakfast," Ezra heard a fat old gander say, just as he crept to the window to listen. "There are three travellers for breakfast and we shall have our fill of the broken meats they leave upon the table."

"But," piped up a pretty little hen pitifully, "how shall we ever enjoy our breakfast if the landlord allows his daughter Miriam to feed us? We have never done her any harm, yet she is so spiteful that she will be sure to kick us and torment us when she gives us our breakfast."

"That is true," agreed a solemn old goose, "she has a fair face, but heaven help her husband! I know if my goslings acted like her I would soon teach them better manners."

"Well," said Elijah who had also risen and come to the window, "do you still desire to marry the beautiful maiden?"

"No, indeed," answered Ezra with a shudder. "Let us pay our reckoning and go away at once, for I never want to see her again."

On the evening of the second day it happened that the travellers found shelter in the home of a pious Jewish scholar with a most beautiful daughter, Rachel, who so charmed Ezra that he again begged Elijah to secure her for his bride. Again Elijah bade the young man wait until the next morning in order to hear any good advice which might be spoken beneath his window. The young man waited impatiently for the dawn, when, sure enough, he was able to understand the twitterings of the swallows in the eaves.

"Did you see the young man who came courting the daughter of the house yesterday?" twittered one of the tiny birds. "He seemed such a worthy youth that it

is a pity he should not find a more pious wife to rule his home."

"It is indeed a great pity," answered another swallow. "Often when I see her decking herself before her mirror instead of lighting the Sabbath candles or preparing the house for the Sabbath princess, I am proud of our ancestors. For although they were only birds, they risked their lives to bring water to put out the fire which destroyed the Temple at Jerusalem. While this girl, who should be a good Jewish daughter, sometimes forgets to keep the Sabbath and the holy days of her people."

"Do you still desire Rachel for your wife?" asked Elijah, coming to the young man's bedside.

"No, indeed," cried Ezra. "I would rather remain a bachelor all my life than wed such an impious woman. Help me to find a wife who is both loving and pious or I will have to ask for a safer gift."

Elijah promised nothing, but proposed that they should look a little further. On the evening of the third day the three travellers came to a hut in the midst of a great forest and knocked upon the door. A young girl, the most beautiful maiden Ezra had ever looked upon, opened the door and bade them welcome. Leah, for that was her name, told them how her father and mother had been forced to flee to the forest to escape from the swords of the Romans; they had both died there and left her alone. "But I am not too lonely," she said, "for I have my household duties to keep me busy, and the little birds and tiny creatures of the forest keep me company."

The three ate of the simple but tasty meal the maiden had prepared for them with her own hands. Before they slept, Ezra begged Elijah to lose no time in presenting him as a suitor for the maiden's hand. "Leah is an orphan," he reminded Elijah, "and I am sure you need not be

reminded that it is the duty of a pious Jew to see that every virtuous orphan girl is married as soon as she is old enough to pass under the marriage canopy."

"I will try to do my duty and marry Leah to a worthy suitor," promised Elijah. "But first you must make certain that she is the only wife in the world for you, for on several occasions you have shown yourself a very foolish judge as soon as you looked upon a pretty maiden's face. Wait until tomorrow and see what the wise ones about your window advise you to do."

The next morning, when the dawn streaked the sky with crimson, Ezra awoke to hear the sparrows chirping in the trees about the little hut. He listened intently and this time he was even happier than before that he understood their language.

"What a handsome young man came wooing Leah last evening!" chirped one of the sparrows. "I only hope he is as virtuous and learned as he is handsome;

he should be a rare youth to deserve such a beautiful maiden."

"Have I not told you many times that beauty is deceitful and favor is vain?" croaked another, whose voice seemed husky with old age. "But in this case the maiden is as good as she is beautiful."

"She always throws us crumbs in winter," cried one sparrow.

"And when I see her lighting the Sabbath candles as her mother taught her to do," said another, "I always add another song to my evening prayer, asking the Master of the Birds to bless her. Happy is the husband of so pious and so gentle a wife!"

"He will be happy indeed," said Elijah, coming to Ezra and clasping his hand. "Now dress at once and pray and make ready for the morning meal. For as soon as we have eaten, I will ask Leah to marry you and Rabbi Joshua here will perform the ceremony."

Leah consented to marry Ezra at once, for she too had fallen in love with him at first sight. Rabbi Joshua performed the ceremony and Elijah the prophet acted as witness, producing the marriage contract and the cup of wine and even the wedding canopy from his marvellous girdle as soon as these articles were needed. He kissed the bride and blessed her; then the two lovers, to the anthem sung by the happy birds, started their wedding journey toward Ezra's home, where they lived together in great happiness till the day of their death.

Rabbi Joshua looked after them as they disappeared from sight among the trees. Then, forgetting his promise, he turned to Elijah with a question: "What would you have done if the sparrows had complained against Leah instead of praising her?" he asked.

Elijah frowned darkly. "Do you want me to leave you at once, right in the middle of this dense forest, or will you

promise to stop asking me foolish questions?" he demanded.

Rabbi Joshua promised.

A little way off in the forest, there lived a poor Jewish wood-cutter and his wife and six children, three boys and three girls. On this particular morning Hayim had left his house to chop some fire-wood. He sat down upon a log, greatly discouraged as he thought of the few pennies he was able to earn each day by the hardest toil and the growing needs of his large and hungry family. He remembered that his wife had told him only that morning that the three girls all needed sandals and new dresses for the Sabbath and that there was not a cent in the house to pay for Hebrew lessons for their three sons. She had scolded Hayim a little, too, telling him that if he had been born with a real head upon his shoulders instead of a head of cabbage, he would surely be able to devise some plan for supporting and educating his children.

Poor Hayim felt so utterly discouraged after his wife's latest scolding, that when Elijah and Rabbi Joshua crossed his path and the former asked him the way to the nearest town, he merely grunted a reply and pointed up the twisted pathway.

"My friend," chided Elijah, "you are not over courteous to travellers in distress."

"I am always in distress myself," complained Hayim. "I should be indeed glad to be a traveller—even in distress—if I could only get away from my troublesome wife and children."

"You should be ashamed of yourself to speak so of your wife and family," said Elijah. "Is it not written that children are a heritage from the Lord and that a good wife is a crown unto her husband?"

"I know all that," agreed Hayim, "and I consider myself far too ignorant to argue with a man as old and learned as you seem to be. Only if my children are a gift from the Lord, I wish He would help me provide for them."

"God has just sent you a gift through me," answered Elijah, "for I am the Friend of the Needy and I have been thinking of your case for some time and considering which would be the best way to help you. It happens that you are destined to enjoy seven good years, seven years of plenty, free from trouble of any kind. Tell me, shall I give you the gift now?"

Hayim rose and regarded Elijah suspiciously. "The old man with you seems a simple scholar," he said, "and I do not think there is any evil in him. But you must be a wizard if you go about offering to relieve people of their troubles without demanding payment. Tell me, what is your name?"

"I am a Friend of the Needy," answered Elijah.

"I think you are a Friend of the Wizards," answered Hayim. "As a good Jew I must not accept gifts from a heathen worker of magic. I tell you I do not trust

you in spite of your good Jewish beard and your travelling companion, who seems both harmless and pious. You may have secured both your beard and this Rabbi through magic means. Go away, for I would rather bear the troubles God sends upon me than lighten them through the favors of one of the evil ones."

Elijah was not offended at the honest man's suspicions. In fact, he was greatly pleased that Hayim was too pious to resort to magic to better his fortunes. The next day he again appeared to the wood-cutter and offered to help him. Again Hayim repulsed him; but on the third day, when Elijah for the third time offered him seven good years, the poor fellow said: "I would be afraid to accept any gift, even if it came from God, without consulting my wife who, although she is an untaught woman, is much cleverer than I am. Meet me tomorrow at this same place and I will tell you what she commands me to do."

The next day, when Elijah and Rabbi Joshua sought the wood-cutter, Hayim was ready with his answer. "My wife told me to accept the seven good years you offered me," he said, "since they will cost us nothing and we can never be more poverty-stricken than we are today."

"Your wife is a very sensible woman," smiled Elijah. "But when do you want the seven good years—shall they begin at once, or do you wish to receive your good fortune at the end of your life and enjoy seven rich years just before your death?"

Hayim scratched his head doubtfully. "I'd rather not decide such an important question," he said at last. "If you'll be kind enough to come back tomorrow, I'll see my wife in the meantime and answer what she tells me to say. Because if I choose for myself, she'll be sure to tell me for the rest of my days that I have chosen unwisely."

"I am afraid you have a nagging wife," said Elijah.

"I thought you once said that a wife was a crown to her husband," grumbled Hayim.

The next day he had his answer ready and spoke with decision, because he was sure his wife would never have a chance to scold him for his choice.

"My wife says I must choose the seven good years at once," Hayim told Elijah. "As usual she has the very best of reasons. She says that now while our children are young we need all the help we can get to clothe and feed them properly and especially to send our sons to school that they may learn to become good Jews. She says also that if we bring up our children properly, they will be glad to support us in our old age, so then we will no longer be in need of your promised years of prosperity."

"I believe you have a shrewd wife," said Elijah. "Well, go home, and before you cross the threshold you will find that the seven good years have begun. But

remember to make the best of them, for at the end of your seven years of plenty I will come to take them back again."

Hayim went home a little doubtfully, for he could not believe that any prosperity would ever come to his door. But as he came to a little clearing before his hut, his youngest son, Jacob, ran to him screaming with excitement. "Father, father," he cried, "I was digging a hole before our house and I found a great iron pot. It was too heavy for me to lift alone; but when I raised the cover, I found it all filled with shining yellow pieces like this," and he showed his father a gold coin he held in his hand.

Hayim rushed to examine the pot, which he found filled to overflowing with gold coins of great value. In fact, one of these coins was sufficient to buy food for the family for many months, or pay the tuition of the three boys at Hebrew School for a whole year. Hayim called his wife, who came running out of the house to

examine the treasure. Fortunately for little Jacob, she was so excited over the discovery that she entirely forgot to whip him for getting his clothes all muddy and grimy while digging in the ground.

For seven whole years Elijah led Rabbi Joshua to many places upon the face of the earth and they had many strange adventures together. But at the end of the seven years, Elijah led the Rabbi back to the very spot in the forest where they had first met Hayim.

Sure enough, the wood-cutter was there, now comfortably dressed, a contented look upon his stupid face.

"Peace be upon you, Hayim," said Elijah. "I see that you have remembered our engagement and have come back to terminate our bargain. Today your seven good years draw to a close."

But Hayim only smiled. "Not so fast, good father," he said with an impudent air that shocked Rabbi Joshua, "for my good wife told me that if you wished the

seven good years to end you might as well fetch away your good fortune yourself. We have spent very many gold pieces; but the pot in which they were found is still full to overflowing. If you do not wish it to remain in the hands of my family forever, you must walk through the forest to my house and take away the magic vessel."

"I will go to your house if I must," said Elijah a little doubtfully, "but I feel that I shall not fare well with your wife. She must be a very determined woman."

"She is," said Hayim.

Hayim's wife stood at the door, waiting to greet her husband and her guests. She was a tiny woman with piercing black eyes, which seemed to snap in her head. Rabbi Joshua was glad that he did not have to bargain with her; he waited eagerly to hear what Elijah would say.

"Peace be upon you, wife of Hayim," began Elijah. "I have come to tell you that your seven good years have expired."

"Not so fast," answered Hayim's wife. Although her tone was pleasant enough, still her manner made them all a little uneasy. "First come into our house. I want to show you something."

Elijah and the Rabbi followed her across the threshold of the neat comfortable house, which had replaced Hayim's former hovel. Within everything was clean and homelike; the three daughters sat busy with their needlework, the three sons swayed over their books as they chanted their lessons for the next day. In one chimney nook a blind beggar nodded over a bowl of warm soup; in the other a ragged woman fed her hungry child bread and milk out of a blue bowl with one of Hayim's wife's best silver teaspoons.

Hayim's wife without a word went to the cupboard; she drew out a small account book which she placed in Elijah's hand. Glancing down the pages he saw that the clever woman had set down every item of expense from the first day

the seven good years began. He saw entries which pleased him; a cow purchased for an unfortunate relative; a sum of money to release a friend thrown into prison for his debts; gold spent for a shroud and decent burial for a stranger found dead in the midst of the forest. There were items, too, telling of clothes and comforts purchased for Hayim, his wife and his children, but except for the boys' education, the family had spent very little money for themselves.

"This is our accounting for the seven good years," said Hayim's wife. "Now, if you think we have done ill with our wealth, take it away and bestow the blessing elsewhere." She brought the magic pot of gold from under the cupboard and set it upon the table. "But if you think we have used our wealth sensibly, living frugally in our home, but never turning the needy from our doors, why not let us be your stewards and distribute the gold a little longer?"

"Hayim," said Elijah, "now I understand why you consult your wife in all things. She is a most intelligent woman. Keep the gold, for you have both used it wisely and your seven good years will continue to the day of your death."

As soon as they had left the house, Rabbi Joshua turned to Elijah with a question he could not keep to himself any longer. "What will you do if that good and sensible woman dies first?" he asked. "Hayim certainly cannot be trusted with the treasure; yet if you should take it from him, without his wife to look after him, he will surely die of want in his old age."

"I will leave you the very next time you ask me another question," answered Elijah the prophet angrily.

In a certain large city where Rabbi Joshua and Elijah found themselves the next day, they saw a man dressed in mean garments, seated upon the steps of a house which seemed almost ready to fall

to pieces. He was praying so earnestly that he did not hear their approach; Elijah motioned to the Rabbi to make no sound and they stood by in silence until the ragged man had finished his petitions.

"O Lord of the World," prayed the unhappy man, "Thou knowest there is none to whom I can tell my tale of woe, none who will have pity upon me. I have neither brother nor kinsman nor friend; my starving little ones within are crying for hunger. Have mercy and send us aid at once, or let death come and put an end to our sufferings."

"I have come—let me help you," said Elijah, stepping forward.

"Who are you?" gasped the other.

"I am the Friend of the Needy," was the answer. "Take me and sell me as a slave. The money you will receive in payment for my services will relieve the needs of your family; it will grow into a large fortune for you to enjoy in your old age."

Rabbi Joshua longed to protest, yet dared not. But the man Elijah hoped to benefit broke into noisy objections, declaring that he would rather die of hunger on the spot than see such a venerable old man as the stranger suffer the hardships of slavery for his sake.

"Fool," said Elijah rather sternly, "am I not old enough to know what is best for both you and me? Lead me to the market place at once and place me upon the slave block or you will repent of your disobedience."

By the greatest good fortune it happened that as soon as Elijah was placed upon the slave block and the crowd heard the announcement that he was a skilled architect, Simon, the wealthiest man in the city, came forward to bid for him. Simon had after long negotiations arranged for his daughter's marriage to the most renowned among the younger scholars in Israel. In those days it was the custom to honor learning rather than gold; al-

though the youth was very poor, Simon had promised that he would give his daughter the dowry of a princess and erect a stately palace for a wedding present. Unfortunately Simon's only daughter was as difficult to please as a real princess. The most skilled workmen in the land had striven to erect a palace which would suit her fancy, but Simon's daughter had sulked and fretted, finding fault with all the plans shown to her, declaring that if her father didn't build her a palace which she considered fit to live in, she would not get married to the scholar he had chosen for her or to anybody else as long as she lived.

"Yes, I can build you a palace such as the world has never seen before," Elijah told Simon, much to the horror of Rabbi Joshua, who was standing close by. For the rabbi, although he had seen Elijah perform many wonders, was sure that he was incapable of such a miracle.

"If you will build me a palace which

pleases my daughter and finish it in six months, I will set you free," promised Simon. Then he turned to the poor man who had been Elijah's master for an hour and counted ten pieces of silver into his hand. "As soon as this man draws up a plan for the palace which meets with my daughter's approval, I will buy him outright from you for any sum you may care to mention," he promised.

Elijah's former owner went home rejoicing, while Simon, at the prophet's request, led him to the great marshy lowland where he intended to have the palace erected. "Of course, I shall have all this land drained," said Simon, "while you are going over the plans and designs with my daughter. Now I will take you to my slave quarters that you may rest before beginning to work on the plots for my daughter's palace."

The next morning the man who had accepted Elijah as a slave was awakened by angry poundings at his door. He

opened it and found upon his doorsteps, not only Simon but a band of his servants all armed with sticks and clubs.

"Thief!" cried Simon, "give me back my ten pieces of silver."

"Alas—I spent one of them on bread and meat and wine for my starving family. But they were mine to spend, for I gave you my slave in return."

"A pretty slave!" and Simon shook his fist in the other's face. "This morning when I went to the slave quarters he was gone, and no man saw him depart. He promised to build me a satisfactory palace and I promised it in my turn to my daughter; now she will be so angry that I am afraid to look her in the face."

"Hush—ssh!" murmured several of the serving men. "Here she comes now."

But Simon's daughter was not angry at all. She flung her arms around her father's neck and kissed him many times in front of everyone right there in the open streets. "You are the dearest father

in the world!" she said. "This morning when I was out walking I passed the plot of land where you have long promised me I shall have my palace. Yesterday it was a swamp; today it is drained and fair gardens grow upon it; and in the midst of the trees and flowers stands a most wonderful palace. You must have erected it by magic to have it completed so quickly."

"I am sure it was erected by magic," agreed Simon. Turning to the man he had lately reviled, he not only promised him a princely sum for his slave's services, but actually invited him to his daughter's wedding, which, he was now sure, would take place very soon.

"I am satisfied with every single thing in the palace," sang Simon's daughter in her joy, "gardens, stables—everything! I went over the whole place from garret to cellar and I can't find a single thing to complain of."

"That is also a great miracle," murmured her father.

Meanwhile Rabbi Joshua was wandering discontentedly about the city, fearing that some ill might have come of the prophet's latest adventure. Suddenly he came upon Elijah himself, making his leisurely way toward the city gate. The prophet was in very good humor over his feat of erecting a wonder palace in a single night; he chuckled with mirth as he pictured the astonishment of Simon and his friends and their fruitless search for the architect.

"But there is one thing which troubles me," said Rabbi Joshua thoughtfully. "Why, instead of suffering the disgrace of being sold as a slave, did you not give the poor man a large enough sum of money to relieve his necessities? Or why didn't you build a palace for him to sell to Simon?"

Elijah thumped the ground angrily with his staff. "I have warned you twice before not to trouble me with foolish questions," he told Rabbi Joshua. "This is the third

offense and my patience is exhausted. Farewell!"

With the last word he disappeared as suddenly as he had appeared to Rabbi Joshua, who had to find his way home the best way he could without his travelling companion. Until the end of his days he never saw Elijah again.

VI

In our days Elijah seldom visits the earth, although every year at their Passover feast Jewish boys and girls still open the door wide that he may enter, and set aside a goblet of wine for his refreshment and an empty chair that he may rest for a moment from his wanderings. Some of the rabbis say that he now abides at the gates of heaven, receiving the prayers of mortals which he weaves into fiery garlands and presents to God. Others say that his chief duty is to offer up daily sacrifices in the invisible sanctuary, for the Temple of Jerusalem was never really

destroyed and today it exists, though hidden from the sight of men.

The rabbis tell us also that although we have not seen Elijah for so many weary years, he may come back to earth at any time and resume his good deeds. When he comes again, the world will be better than ever before, for his coming is sure to usher in peace and loving kindness to all mankind. But even the wisest of the sages of Israel cannot be sure of the exact moment of his coming. So it is not too early to look for him any time; and if you should ever come upon a very old man with white beard and hair, dressed in a coarse brown robe and carrying a traveller's staff, wandering from place to place and doing good as he goes, you may be sure he is Elijah.

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